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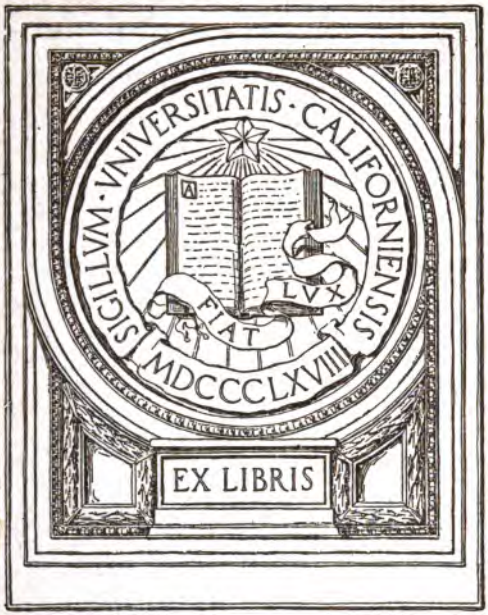
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THE TERRIBLE ISLAND

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By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

Author of "Red Bob of the Islands," "In the Strange South Seas," etc.

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THE TERRIBLE ISLAND

CHAPTER I

THE GIRL FROM THE SEA

IT was a moonlight night, and Rocky Jim and I had come down to Sapphira Gregg's.

If you have never seen a moonlight night on a coral island, there is little use trying to describe it to you. If you have, you will remember the white blaze on the coral sand, the white sparkling of the polished palm leaves, the silver air full of light reflected from the sea's great shining glass, better than I can tell it. There is no moon like the moon of the coral isles.

Jim and I were in no sense of the word splendid, yet we walked that night in the midst of splendour that surrounded and rayed from us like the halo of glory surrounding and raying from a saint. Jim took off his hat—you don't need a hat on an island night, but he was never seen parted from his—and carried it in his hand.

"I want to let that silver water run through my hair," he said. "It feels good."

I answered in the words of the poet whose name I never can remember—

> "God makes such nights, all white and still,
> Far's you can look or listen. . . ."

"I don't reckon He does," said Rocky Jim, plodding along the sand at my side.

Sapphira Gregg's house, its brown thatch silvered, black velvet pools of shadow underneath its eaves, was close to us now.

"I think," said Jim, kicking up the sand, "something else makes these nights. It's starlight nights that's religious. These ain't. Nor it isn't the devil that makes them either."

"What then?" I asked cautiously. You have to tread with care, approaching Jim on spiritual subjects. If you do not, he darts back into his shell.

"Fairies, or such," offered Jim. He watched me with one eye. "Not that one believes in fairies. But sometimes you believe in a thing you don't believe in."

I was mute. Jim on folk-lore—I had not hoped for so much.

With the uncanny intuitive power of the men of the wilderness, Jimmy read my vivisecting thoughts.

"I reckon," he said briefly, "it's a night things might happen." Then he spat on the sand, to disabuse himself of any charge of sentimentality, and asked me for a match, with the air of one who closes a subject.

"Magic things? fairy things?" I asked, forbearing to quote Keats.

Jim looked at me absent-mindedly.

"I wonder'll Sapphira have any beer left?" he speculated; and I knew the hermit crab was back in its shell, its claws crossed across the doorway. . . .

But since that night, the birthnight of so much sorrow, so much joy, I have often wondered if Jim, wise man of the wilderness, knew unconsciously what I, the fool of colleges, could not know?

Well!—Sapphira came out of the soot-black shadow of the verandah to meet us.

"Mr. Flower's come," was her greeting.

"Good!" said Jim, and "Who's Flower?" said I, in the same breath.

"New Government surveyor come to do my block," answered Sapphira. She stood out on the sand, those strange black eyes of hers, that sometimes looked light grey, staring unseeingly at us. Sapphira always looked at you as if she did not see you, as if she were looking through you, and beyond you, searching, searching ever . . . I think, for her youth that was no more.

"Then there'll be no beer," I suggested, not feeling particularly sorry. Though I lived in New Guinea, I was not a drinker.

"Who says so?" flashed Sapphira, her eyes suddenly opening, and showing themselves not black, but the colour of steel.

"I thought the Government officer . . ."

"When a Government officer comes to my house, he knows what's good for him. Same as all of them. Same as you. You came down here for beer. Go in and get it, and don't forget the money. The Government officer can go——!" She said plainly and calmly where he might go to.

We did what she told us. On Croker Island, and all about the long tail-end of New Guinea, where islands and islands are, everyone, in those days, did what Sapphira Gregg told them—unless they were within the kingdom of famous Mrs. Carter of North-West. There have always been more queens than kings in Papua.

It was light inside the house, orange light of kerosene lamps. The beer was on a shelf, the till beneath it. If Mrs. Gregg kept a "sly grog shop," it had less slyness

about it than any other south of the Line. That was Sapphira. She had never heard the saying "Pecca fortiter," but she believed in sinning, if you did sin, in the open.

We helped ourselves, put the money through the slit, and came out on to the verandah. We heard the Government surveyor moving about within, and guessed that he could see about as much or as little as he liked through the semi-transparent walls of sago stem. Apparently he liked to see nothing. It was not until we had settled down on the verandah with bottles and glasses that he came out. He refused an offer of beer, and found himself a long chair. Sapphira had returned; she dropped on the floor, sitting cross-legged with amazing ease for a woman of her years, and stared out through the door. Her marvellous knot of yellow-grey hair showed on the top of her head like a cable flemish-coiled for captain's inspection.

I lit a cigarette, and wondered what the new officer was like. But I did not wonder much, for Jimmy had said "good" when his coming was announced, and I trusted the taste of Rocky Jim. It was true he had acquired his nick-name through a transaction not doubtfully illegal, involving the loading up of a boat with copra that contained some tons of coral boulders skilfully disposed. But there were two sides to the story, and New Guinea, in its curious list of precedence, that gives so little to money or position, and so much to character, had placed him high. If Jimmy said it was "good" that Flower had come, why, I was prepared to like Flower.

And on Croker Island, away at the end of New Guinea, which is at the end of the world, with the wild cannibals

of the mainland for all our society, outside some half-dozen traders, the coming of Flower or of any white man was an event of supreme importance.

I could not see much of him, however, for he had got into the dark corner of the verandah, and only his legs were visible in the moonlight—immensely long legs, with big flat feet at the end of them. Now and then, when he moved his position, one could catch the glimpse of a big ugly hand, with a seal ring on it. When he spoke, his voice seemed to match himself, it was big and rough. But I did not dislike it.

We talked at first of the current "news"—the cannibal raid in the hills a few miles behind us; trade talk of copra and pearl shell, the inevitable Papuan chatter about movements of launches and schooners. All the time Sapphira sat like a figure of some Oriental god, cross-legged and immovable, staring out from under the velvet dark of the verandah to the moon-white beach and sea. By and by Rocky Jim let drop a stray word about red shell, and she instantly awoke.

"Who are you to be talking of red shell, and what do you know?" she said, without moving.

"I don't know as much as you do, Mrs. Gregg," allowed Jim. "But I reckon I've fished it a bit."

"What is it?" bourdonned the deep voice from the Government surveyor's corner.

"Ask Mrs. Gregg," said Jim. "She's done more trading in it than anyone except the Queen of North-West Island. She takes a canoe and goes up and down the coast. Anywhere she goes. Recruiting too. Places where they'd eat you as soon as look at you. As for red shell, she can find it——"

"But what is it?"

"Shell they make the native money of," said Sapphira explanatorily. "If you had been longer than six weeks in the country you'd know without my telling you. Why, that red money—you see it everywhere—is more to them than our good sovereigns and shillings. You can make a native give you ten shillings' worth of yams for seven and six of native money any day."

"I think I've seen the stuff in Samarai. Like sixpences made of a kind of dull coral. What's it worth?"

"Every one of those is worth threepence to fourpence-halfpenny, according to size. Oh, I can tell you"—Sapphira spoke with a certain contempt in her tones; she was always a little contemptuous when giving information to newcomers—"I can tell you, if anyone could find Ku-Ku's Island his fortune would be made."

"What in the name of commonsense is Ku-Ku's Island?"

But here Rocky Jim and I broke in together. We told him all about it in a breath. Everyone at the tail-end of New Guinea was mad about Ku-Ku's Island in those days. We told him—interrupting and supplementing each other, and getting quite excited—that in the days before the Government came there was a chief of the Trobriand Islands, further out to sea, called Ku-Ku. He had been an exceedingly powerful chief, from all one heard; had raided, captured, and made slaves everywhere; rivalled King Solomon in the number of his wives, and in his old age owned twenty sons as strong as steel. He had immense treasures, from a native point of view; besides the wives, he had pigs so many that they could not be counted, and a storehouse full of stone axes, obsidian clubs, and the valuable red shell money that can only be got at Papua's east end.

Now all the natives were anxious to know where Ku-Ku the great chief got his shell, and the few white men who were in the country in those days were more than anxious, for they knew there must be a fortune in Ku-Ku's private store. His treasure-house in the Trobriands was well known, but there was another that no one knew, away somewhere among the tang of unknown islets, cays, and reefs that spreads far out in the Pacific from New Guinea's end. There, it was supposed, he kept the immense hoards of shell money that had made him a Papuan millionaire; there his beds of wonderfully rich good shell must be. . . .

Oh, all New Guinea of the eastern end wanted to know about it. And some of them got to know. But they never told.

Once and again, Ku-Ku would set off for some unnamed destination in his huge carved war canoe, with his twenty sons acting as crew. And he would take with him a dozen or so of the Trobriand people, strong young men, capable of much work. They would not go willingly, but Ku-Ku was a great chief, and—they went.

Most of them never returned. Those who did, came back—blind. They could not tell where they had been. They could only say that on the long voyage out, Ku-Ku made magic, and took their sight away. And when they got to the island they were made to work shell money, which is a thing that a blind man can do if he practises hard. Ku-Ku saw that they did practise. And after years and years nearly all of them died; but some one or two—for a caprice, or to prevent other people seeking—Ku-Ku allowed to return home and tell the tale.

This was the story we told to the surveyor, who sat

there in the dusk, and listened without comment until the end. Then he said,

"It sounds like a native yarn. What happened to Ku-Ku?"

"He was stabbed by one of the blind men."

"He would be. . . . And the twenty sons? Good idea, that; kept the thing in the family."

"Nobody ever knew, but most people think they were all drowned together in the big gale of eighty-nine."

"Anyone ever go looking for the island?"

"Some," said Jim. "But they can't get the natives to tell anything about the direction. We all think they know, but are scared to tell."

"Why?"

"They think we'd have to bring some of them as crew, and every nigger at the east end is scared of the very name. Because they say that after Ku-Ku's death, two men did go out and find the island, but the devil-pigeons got them and picked their eyes out, and they say the same will happen to anyone else who goes there."

"The devil-pigeon," I explained, "is a well-known Papuan superstition. They believe that a malicious devil takes the form of a bird, and hides in the forests by nights. It calls people, and they follow it up, hoping to shoot it because it imitates the call of a bird that is good to eat. But when it gets them into the depths of the forest, it takes its own form, tears out their eyes, and leaves them there to wander till they die."

"Well," said the surveyor thoughtfully, "I should not allow a tale of a devil-pigeon to interfere with me, if I wanted to go hunting for a treasure island."

"It would be all right if one could get at the informa-

tion independently of the natives. But they're very secretive," I explained.

"He's a bug-hunter, so he sees plenty of them," observed Rocky Jim.

"I collect hemiptera and coleoptera for Rothschild," I said. I am a little sensitive about this profession of mine. It pays—in a country like Papua—but it is so obviously adapted to what I am. . . .

I felt the surveyor, in the dusk, turning away his eyes from my lame leg and crooked side. He made no comment.

"It takes one about the bush, and you have to get the natives to help you," I went on. "I've often tried to find out about the island, but they shut up like a knife at the very mention of Ku-Ku."

"Was there any truth in the yarn about the blind men?"

"There was," said Sapphira, speaking suddenly. "I saw one of them when he came back."

"You saw him?"

"I did, and he was as blind as a two days' kitten. And never got over it."

"Curious," said the surveyor; and there fell one of the long silences of the far-out places. Where ships are few, and white folk almost non-existent, the mind grows strangely calm. Out back, one does not talk for mere talking's sake. It is when the boat comes in, and for long days after she has left, that the dammed-up river runs. . . . .

I think—I really cannot tell for certain, because the things that happened afterwards have blurred my memory—but I think we were rather enjoying ourselves, there in the shadows out of the moon, with our tobacco

and our glasses, and the sense of leisure deep and exhaustless, of long quiet days when there would be time and time for everything, flowing about us as the sea, away below Sapphira's house, flowed over the quiet reefs. It was calm on the water, but now and then there came a dull, drum-like sound, as a wave, rising mysteriously from the mirror-like sea, burst on the coral sand.

Sapphira was the first to speak.

"There's been weather somewhere or other," she said.

"A long way off," answered Jim, after listening for a minute or two. He reached for his glass; I heard his chair scroop as he moved, and I heard the surveyor in the dark corner clear his throat as if he were about to speak; some trifling remark, indeed, he had just begun, when Sapphira's scream burst forth, and tore the quiet as a jag of lightning tears the brooding clouds.

She was on her feet; we were all on our feet. "What is it?" I was asking her; and the big surveyor was hanging out over the verandah rail, turning his head here and there; and Jim, more self-possessed than anyone, had reached for a jug of water, and was holding it over Sapphira's head. "Stop that, and say what's the matter," I heard him speak, through Sapphira's screams. That something big was the matter we all felt. Sapphira Gregg was no screamer.

She pulled herself together in a wink, shut her mouth, and snatched the jug from Jim's hand. She set it down on the table, took three steps, dramatically— Sapphira was naturally dramatic—on the verandah and pointed.

"If I'm not mad," she said, "a ghost has just walked up out of that sea, and is coming to the house."

Jim took a good look.

"If you're mad, we all are," he said calmly, "because there is a ghost." We looked, and there was.

It was just as a ghost is described, a tall figure, all in trailing white, and it came from the edge of the sea, walking slowly, and it made for the house. Sapphira, the bravest woman in New Guinea of her time (and that is saying much) caught my hand, and squeezed it so hard that she hurt me.

"Owen Ireland," she said, "your face is like an angel's for all you're a poor cripply chap; you must know some prayers. Owen, say them, like a good lad, for I'm blessed" (but she did not say blessed) "if I can remember anything but 'Now I lay me.'"

She held tight to my sleeve.

"Pardon me," said the big surveyor in his bumbling voice, "but it doesn't appear to be a case for prayers. That's not a ghost, it's a girl."

"A girl your granny, walking out of the sea in the middle of the night," said Sapphira, getting angry. But she let go my sleeve.

The white thing out of the sea came on. At first it had been so melted and mingled in the moonlight, as all white figures are on a full-moon tropic night, that its shape was indistinguishable. But now we saw it had hands and feet and head; now we could tell it was something slim and young, with hair that trailed dark over its shoulders—now we saw that it sparkled, strangely, all over, as if it were strewn with frost. . . .

"My oath!" cried Rocky Jim suddenly; "it's a woman in evening dress."

As if the words had been a spell to unloose her frozen faculties, Sapphira let out a cry, ran down the steps,

and seized the strange figure, but quite gently, by the arms. It collapsed, and fell upon her breast.

Sapphira lifted the light weight easily, and carried it up the steps. In a moment she had come to dominate the situation. We, who had been her protectors against the unknown, were now her henchmen and her slaves.

"Go and get the kettle on the boil—kareharrega" (hurry up), she ordered Rocky Jim. Me she looked at and passed over; I knew why. "Take her feet," she ordered the surveyor, and Flower took them. The full light of the lamp shone on the strange group, as Sapphira and Flower passed into the bedroom. I was not conscious of seeing details at the time—for the whole thing was dazing—but I remembered them afterwards.

I saw a tall—excessively tall—awkward man, with a queer Punch-like face, hook nose, large ears, ugly chin, and a pair of deep-set splendid eyes. He had to bend low over his burden, since Sapphira had taken the head. In his hands were two feet, as beautiful as a Spanish duchess's, clad only in fine silk stockings. The stockings were badly torn, and, like the spangled satin dress, were dripping with sea-water. I could not see the woman's face, because it had fallen aside. Her dark wet hair swept the floor as they carried her into the bedroom.

Sapphira took the situation in hand as a man takes a shying horse. I don't know how many minutes it was—or how few—before she had got hot water and hot blankets, hot (unlicensed) grog, and fresh clothes, put the girl into dry garments, got her to bed, revived her and left her alone, with an imperial command against talking or attempting to keep awake. We useless men sat on the verandah and listened to her. I think we felt obscurely that we were somehow in fault. Sapphira

was a mighty nurse in certain emergencies of frontier life, and she could not help putting on the midwife manner, which, as you will remember, comprehends a general pity and contempt for male mankind.

She came out at last, dropped on the floor again, and sat there, more like an Indian image than ever, with her beehive coil of hair shining on the top of her head, and her strange eyes, where the flames of her wild youth had left a spark or two, aglow like fading camp-fires under autumn rain. Jim and I assailed her with questions.

"She's not awake—not rightly, yet," answered Sapphira. "She didn't say where the wreck was. No, she told nothing about the boat, if they got away in one. Or about anyone else."

"We ought to look on the beach," said Jim, and was off down the white stretch of sand before I had time to lift myself from my chair. I followed him slowly; we both looked everywhere one could look, for traces of a wreck or a boat; we found none. Jim thought he saw something black and low floating far out at sea; it might have been the keel of an upturned whaleboat—if indeed he saw anything; he was not sure.

"There's no trace," he said disappointedly, returning with me to the house. "Only that." He pointed with his hand, and stood still to listen, as one of the slow, rolling waves that we had heard earlier in the night began curling itself up out of the glassy water. It swept restlessly in, and burst upon the sand.

"That swell is stronger than it looks; it must have brought her in. I take it she was unconscious, and so floated naturally, and when she got to the beach and was thrown on it, she waked up. But what beats me," Jim declared, "is where the wreck can have been."

We were up to the house again by now, and the big surveyor, his eyes turning from one to another of us (as I thought) like the shifting lights of a lighthouse, was listening. So was Sapphira.

"There's no liner runs within three hundred miles of here," speculated Jim. "And if people were wrecked and came in a boat—if that was a boat I saw, which I don't somehow think——" He got entangled in his predicates, and appealed wordlessly to me.

"You mean, if people came three hundred miles in a boat they wouldn't land in good condition and tidy," I explained. Jim looked grateful.

"Tidy!" spat Sapphira. "With the sequin passementerie hanging loose all over the décolletage, and—— Good condition! The girl's placket is split from top to bottom."

"God, Sapphira," said Rocky Jim, turning very pale, "you can sit there and say that, and not a doctor nearer than Samarai. Is there any hope for her?"

"The placket," said the big surveyor, "is, I understand, not any vital part of the human body, but the sort of gully where things run together at the back of a frock."

"Where's your wife?" asked Sapphira sharply.

"In Napier cemetery, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand," replied Flower composedly.

"I reckon," said Sapphira, fixing him with her burnt-out eyes, "that she died some time ago, because plackets aren't at the back any more; they're at the side. It's to your credit that you didn't know that, anyhow."

"It is," answered Flower calmly. "What did the girl talk about when you were putting her to bed?"

"How did you know she talked about anything?"

"Because women can't hide things."

"Don't you call me a woman?" warned Sapphira, looking dangerous.

"You're about a hundred and twenty per cent. woman, Mrs. Gregg, so you might as well agree to it," was the big surveyor's reply; and Sapphira, uncomprehending, gave in. I don't know what Jim thought; but from that moment I knew that Percival Flower—such was his hideously inappropriate name—for all his plainness and his awkwardness, was of the unmistakable class of women-tamers. And—I do not know why—my thoughts flew instantly to that mysterious, beautiful figure within the house, lying silent and insensible, with her secret, whatever it might be, locked behind lips that had been closed by God-knew-what of terrible experience.

"You haven't told me what she said yet," went on Flower.

Sapphira eyed us all cunningly, I thought.

"We're friends here?" she said.

"Yes," almost shouted Rocky Jim. "Yes, Sapphira, friends all right." It seemed as if he were defending her.

"Well," she said reluctantly, "the girl said—she said when I was undressing her—mind, she was only raving like, and it might have been plain nonsense, or I might have fancied it——"

"Yes? Yes?" We were all on tiptoe to hear—at least Jim and I were. You could not be sure what Flower felt.

"She said, 'They're gone, they're gone.' And then she was quiet for a bit, and then she said, 'They're gone to Ku-Ku Island.'"

"WHAT!"

"Yes, that's what she said. And then she talked about the water, and something about sharks, and then she was saying her prayers—not knowing she said them, I reckon, but no doubt they'll go down to her correct account just the same. And then she went right off, and that was all."

We looked at Sapphira with astonished eyes. But she was clearly speaking the truth.

"What do you think?" I asked Rocky Jim.

"Looks to me," he answered in a low voice, "as if Sapphira was just worked up, and had that name in her mind, and thought she heard the girl say it, when all she said was some name that sounded like it. Niu Niu perhaps. There's dozens of islands with that name; it means coconuts."

"I think so too," I answered him.

But looking at the big surveyor's face, I saw by the traces of thoughtfulness on its rugged surface that he reckoned otherwise.

CHAPTER II

"WHO AM I?"

NEXT morning Sapphira gave us all breakfast (Jim and I had stayed the night) and told us that we need not expect to see anything of the girl that day. Quiet was what she wanted; she seemed strange, and not in her right senses yet.

"Has she suffered any injury?" asked Flower.

Sapphira shot him a keen glance.

"I can't say, Mr. Know-all," she answered. "There's a bump on her head that won't go down, but that mightn't be anything."

"It might not," agreed the surveyor.

We were disappointed, but I think everyone recognised the necessity of submitting to Sapphira's judgment. Without words, it seemed to be agreed among us that we should all stay on at the store until the mysterious lady from the sea became visible. I was not much concerned about the supposed mention of Ku-Ku's Island—it was so ridiculously unlikely—but I wanted to see the owner of those two beautiful pathetic feet, and to know what strange fate had led them into the wild paths of Papua. Jim had a vague idea that perhaps there might be something in what the girl had said, but the only reason he could offer was that the whole affair was so improbable that "one wouldn't be surprised at anything." I snubbed him, and he gave in.

Flower, after breakfast, went off to work with his boys, who tailed behind him carrying his instruments and chain. We saw them go, a picturesque crowd, with their bushy, flower-crowned heads, and their Government-survey uniform of blue jumper and tunic edged with forest green. Sapphira went into the kitchen, and began scolding her cooky-boy. I judged, from the fragments that reached us, that he had been caught in the too-frequent crime of washing his head in the bread-basin. Jim and I sat on the verandah, smoking, and enjoying, as men outside the professions do enjoy, the ease of ten-o'clock-in-the-morning. Jim could work like a team of bullocks when he had a mind to, and I was making a decent income by the irregular practice of my profession, but neither of us was tied to any master but himself.

I don't know how it might have been with me if I had been as other men—if, even, I had met with my deformity in the way of accident, which takes away half the bitter from the cripple's cup. I might, then, have done as my people wanted me to do, studied medicine or law, made use of the family influence that was at my call, and slipped into the harness worn by the successful among men, with more thought of filled manger and safe stall than of the inevitable drag of trace and rein. Make no mistake, the stall and manger have their value.

But I was not as others, and the trouble dated from my birth. I happened so, lame and askew. Not very much—no, the trouble was

> "Not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door,
> But 'twas enough."

Enough to place me outside; to make me walk a stranger among my contemporaries and equals; to

render me nervous and reserved, and throw me in upon myself for amusement.

I found it. I became an entomologist, and astonished my parents by telling them that I meant to take up entomology as a profession.

If I had been one of their other sons—stalwart George, slim, active Arthur—I think they would have remonstrated. The "bug-hunter" is always a mark for ridicule. But crippled Owen could scarcely make himself more ridiculous than Nature had made him already. So they gave me money to study and take the necessary degree.

There is not much employment for an entomologist in England. I secured a post in Ceylon, at a salary that divided my relatives between laughter and amazement—it did seem so absurd that anyone should pay a man hundreds a year for catching beetles—and went out there. And in Ceylon the thing happened that broke my life.

I must tell you first of all that I have a handsome face. If any man may speak so without being accused of vanity, surely I may. I have sat to artists once or twice; to a sculptor once—for my head, no more. They asked me to do so; begged me, or I would not have done it. Nor would I have done it in any case, if they had not all been poor men, sadly in want of models. One painted me as St. John. Another used me for his now well-known picture of Galahad and the Grail. The sculptor, taking another man for the figure, carved my head in enduring marble, and gave me to the world as that statue that horrified so many churches—THE INNOCENT SOUL IN HELL. The sculptor was right. I am no saint, no white-souled ascetic knight—

though I could not have sat for Lancelot or Gawain with anything more of fitness—but I have suffered, and the suffering has not been deserved.

It was a woman; you knew that. She was young, and very lovely, and she had the tenderest of hearts. Living away from almost all the world on her father's plantation, she saw few men but myself, when I visited the place from time to time to do my professional research work. She came to admire what God has given me of marred, incomplete beauty, and she pitied the rest. We know what heavenly feeling stands nearest to the all-but-heavenly feeling of pity. The one step was taken; she loved me.

Now this girl was not rich, she was even obscure, with little prospect for her future but working for bread, since the plantation was all but ruined by the deadly "Hemileia Vastatrix" insect, and her father was growing old in poverty. She had a brother in Colombo; I think no other relation. I had my salary, and a prospect of money from relatives, if I lived long enough to get it. My family was a good one. One might have thought the match was possible at least.

I spoke to her father. He laughed in my face—a laugh that will meet him again in the corridors of Hell—and told me that he did not kick cripples—so far—but he would rather not be tempted too much. And he called for my horse.

"Ride," he said; "you can do that, anyhow—and I'll send your bugs after you."

I did not see her. I went to Colombo, and her brother called on me. He was quite kind. He pointed out that young, lonely girls sometimes had hysterical ideas; curious attractions towards the unusual and

deformed—morbid fancies, in which no one who had their interests at heart would encourage them. He spoke as if his sister had been caught chewing slate-pencils or eating chalk. . . .

He shook hands very kindly when he said good-bye, and just mentioned that Ena was two years under age. Of course, as a gentleman, I knew what my course must be.

I never saw her again. I wrote once, and she did not answer. I don't know whom it was they married her to, a year or so later.

After that I dropped the harness of a salaried position, dropped everything I had seen or known, and came to the end of the world.

New Guinea is the end of the world. To the capital there comes a three-weekly mail; out back, you may be six months without hearing of anything beyond the ring of your camp-fire and your tent. Civilisation, what there is of it, is a narrow belt around the shores. Inland is untravelled save by explorers and Government punitive expeditions; much is untouched even by these. There are a few hundred whites, and a few hundred thousand natives, largely savage and cannibal. You may live, if it please you, beyond the ken of all your race; you may take a new name, and live among your race, but dead to all who have known you. In New Guinea, above all countries in the world, it is possible to be forgotten, and to forget.

You do not ask each other, in this land of the lost, what has been the history of days spent elsewhere. They take you for what you are, for what you can do. They have heard so many lying "histories" from the

remittance men of Home—who, one and all, are rightful heirs to peerages, have been brought up millionaires, cousins of marquises, and have been to school with dukes—that they don't take much stock in what any man may say about himself. Rather, indeed, by what a man does not say, his rank stands in New Guinea. And they don't ask. Nor do you.

I never asked Rocky Jim where he had been, and what he had done, before he came to waste his thirty years of splendid strength upon the cruel Papuan gold-fields, that take their toll of life and health, and give little in exchange. I knew he was a West Australian, and that he had played tricks with people who cheated him, before I came to the country—witness the piece of mischief that had given him his name. Jim seemed soft in some ways; but you were better not banking on that softness. He had a way of getting even. . . .

Samarai remembers to this day the swimming race organised by Jim.

. . . It was a Government official, newly appointed, and, like most officials fresh to the job, he was inclined to strain his authority. It does not much matter what he did to Jim. But Jim's revenge deserves a record.

The Government official was a bit of a dandy, a bit of a ladies' man, very dignified. He was also something of an athlete, and could swim. Jim and that Papuan *enfant terrible*, big Mike Crabb, got hold of him, and of one or two of the same sort, in the bar of the Universal. They made him drink—all that he would drink, which to his credit was not much. But it started him boasting. Jim and Mike Crabb, apparently half asleep and all infantile and innocent, got him to boast more. They induced—in the same simple and childlike manner—the

Government officer's friends to drink a little, and boast a little too. The friends were strangers to Samarai, tourists with a high sense of their own importance. I am afraid they would have described themselves as superior, if not refined. . . .

Jim and Mike worked them up to a challenge swimming race. It was twenty minutes to six o'clock; light still in the sky. They went down to the B.P. wharf, still boasting of what they would do. They were very quick in undressing. Jim and Mike, older men, were slow. The superior youths were into the water in three minutes or so.

And then Jim and Mike, who had taken off coats and shoes, swiftly put them on again, snatched up the whole of the clothes belonging to the superior young men and fled.

Six o'clock is dinner hour in Samarai. Nearly all the town dines in the hotels, and every hotel faces the beach and the wharves. The superior young men could not make anyone hear their frantic entreaties, because everyone was just going to dinner. At last a native heard them, and brought them two copies of the *North Queensland Register*, which is used by Australian "cockles" out back for a family blanket in the cold season. They divided these among them, the two most superior of the young men having a brief and bitter fight on the steps of the wharf for possession of the pink covers, which are thick. Then they ran the gauntlet of the hotels. Samarai enjoyed it exceedingly. As for Mike and Rocky Jim, when the aggrieved parties reproached them in public with their perfidious conduct, they said with one voice that they had been taken scared at the last minute, because the water looked so dangerous,

and a man could not help being a coward. The superior young men felt a little better after this explanation, but the general audience, which knew Mike and Jim and their lurid history, enjoyed itself, if possible, more than ever. . . .

I was remembering these things, and many more, as Jim and I sat on the verandah of the hotel, thinking the "long, long thoughts" that men think in quiet places. (How short-winded your thoughts get—how they sprint in bursts of speed, and stop and halt and rush, in the hurry of the populated lands!) As for Jim, I don't know what he was thinking. His mind was not an open book for everyone to read. Your Papuan gold miner knows how to hold his tongue and his face. But by and by he took his pipe out, spat disgustedly over the rail, and said—

"Hang the fields, anyhow."

"By all means," I agreed. "But why hang them just now?"

"Because," said Jim, "they take you in. You think you're going to come away with a good shammy every time, and the new field's always going to do what the last one didn't. But somehow, in this country it's always half spent, or more, before it comes."

I nodded. I knew the cost of packing to the gold-fields, and the price of goods at stores on the various fields. Sapphira's store wasn't within five days of the nearest field, let alone the water passage, yet its neighbourhood kept her prices up to a figure that would have startled strangers.

"Well," continued Jim, "there are times when it sort of gets you down—the idea of it all. And you wish

there was anything all ready in a lump, that you could just lift and get away with."

"I suppose the men of Babylon felt about the same," I said.

"Yes. Or those jokers under the Ptolemies who built the Great Pyramid." Jim, like most miners, was a heavy reader. "I know it's not new. No more than being hungry for your grub, or liking to own your bit of land instead of renting it. But somehow, the things that's common are the things that get hold of you hardest. Now"—Jim leant forward, his elbows on his knees, his odd, shrewd, humorous face turned to mine—"it has me pretty hard just now that I want to get at something I can grab with both hands."

"I am perfectly certain," I maintained, "that Sapphira made a mistake. How could the girl have said it?" We were talking elliptically, as men do who are much together, but we understood one another.

"I've an idea," said Rocky Jim, "that it's not a question of whether she could or not. The question is whether she did. You might argue over the one till you died of old age, without coming much nearer, but Sapphira can tell us the other before a cuscus could whisk his tail."

"She told us before," I objected, "and we didn't believe her."

"Flower did," said Jim. There fell a silence. It was filled for me, and I believe also for Jim, with dreams. I don't know what his were. Mine ran on curious lines. I had grown to love this strange wild tangle of unheard-of islands more than any place on earth; I saw a palace arise on one of them—a palace of coral, built of white blocks sawn from the reef; I saw in the palace, rooms

full of the marvellous birds and butterflies of Papua, preserved and set up as only I could set them; gardens afire with orchids that were worth their weight in gold; salt-water ponds that should rival the gardens and the butterfly rooms in the wonder of their glittering, jewel-coloured fish—a naturalist's Paradise, in short.

And Ku-Ku's Island was to pay.

"They said," remarked Jim suddenly, "that there was something else."

"Who said?"

"Don't know. People. But they always did say it."

"I never heard that."

"Likely not. I've been here years longer. But they did."

"Why, what could there be? It was a small coral island, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't have been gold?"

"Lord, no, not on a sort of cay such as it must be."

"Pearls?"

"Ku-Ku knew the value of pearl shell; he'd have lifted it."

"Guano?"

"None of these islands are guano islands."

"Well, it couldn't have been anything then."

"Sounds that way. But they did say it."

"You talk like a parrot. Who said it, for any sake, and when?"

"Don't I tell you I don't know? Just a sort of yarn that crept about. Still, they did."

"Jim, if you repeat that again I'll break your head."

"Well, you know," said Jim, turning his coppered

face, with its corn-coloured walrus moustache, towards mine, and looking serious, "when they kept saying it, there must have been something in it."

"If you believe everything you hear in Papua, just because people keep saying it, you'll go a long way on a mighty queer road."

Jim sucked hard at his pipe, and said nothing.

On this Sapphira came out, wiping her hands free from suds—by which I judged that she had executed justice upon the boy, and I attacked her at once.

"Sapphira, are you certain that girl said Ku-Ku Island? There's an awful lot hangs on it."

But Sapphira was in no mood to answer stray questions.

"I'm not easy in my mind," she proclaimed. She plumped down on the floor, and bit her nails. "I believe that girl's going to lose her intellex."

"Good Lord, why?" Human nature is a queer thing. I was conscious of a distinct pang of disappointment, in that the girl was not likely—should she go out of her mind—to be able to tell me what I hoped she knew. You must remember I had not seen her, or my view might have been less selfish.

"Because she's normal temperature since eight o'clock this morning, and she's taking all I give her to eat and drink, and she's as quiet as a lamb, but——" Sapphira chewed the top of her thumb.

"What?"

"She don't know who she is."

"Good Lord!"

"No. She don't know nothing at all. She can talk, and answer me, and seem as reasonable as any other Christian, but ask her a thing before she walked up out

of the sea last night, and she can't tell you. All she can say is, ' It's gone.' "

There was a pause. The swell of last night, not yet quite spent, burst on the beach. A Papuan cuckoo, perched in the cool heart of a mango tree, tuned up its quaint little song—three bars of the *Venetian Waltz*, and a break; three bars over again, always halting at the fourth. . . . I never afterwards heard the bird without a feeling of shadowy sadness. In that moment, it seemed as if a cloud had crept across the sun.

' Rocky Jim looked at the sea and the flour-white sand, his face so utterly devoid of expression that I knew he felt dismayed. You could always interpret any of Jim's emotions in inverse ratio to the amount of their display.

Sapphira, from the floor, went on.

" I'm going to let her come out to-morrow," she said. " She's pretty well all right in one way, and it might shake her intellex up a bit to let her talk to people."

" Do you think she really knows anything about the island ? " asked Jim.

Sapphira put one hand, tinkling with bracelets of rough Papuan gold, upon the floor, and heaved herself up.

" I reckon neither you nor me will ever know if she does," she said, as she disappeared.

Now I had seen almost nothing of Flower the surveyor, and I knew nothing of him save that he could measure lands, but I felt, in this emergency that had come upon the household of the store, that the big surveyor was the person to be wished for. I did not

know what he could do, or what anyone ought to do, when a beautiful girl who had walked up mysteriously from the sea was found to be out of her mind. But I was sure, somehow or other, that he would do it.

We told him—Jim and I—when he came in from his work. He listened gravely, eating the inevitable Papuan "curried tin" the while, and drinking tea as no other man I have heard of, except Doctor Johnson, can possibly have drunk it. If anyone in Papua ever found out Percival Flower's limit in the way of tea-drinking, I never knew him, or her.

He made no remark till he had finished, just ate and drank steadily on (his meal had been kept hot for him after hours) and then, being satisfied, rose from the table.

But we did not get much out of him that night.

"I'll see to-morrow," was all he said. "In the meantime, I wouldn't worry; there's not much to worry about."

It was little enough; still, the note of authority obviously comforted Sapphira. I could see that her ordinary sickroom skill was of no avail to her here, and that, in consequence, she felt mortified, discrowned. . . .

I am a young man still; I may live to be very old—but never, in all the years that may be left to me, shall I think of the day that followed without a stirring of the heart.

Yes—when the strange-faced years, at whose dates we now peer curiously, half timidly, shall have swept down Time's arc to meet us; when my withered old heart, wandering somewhere far away in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, shall chance across some trace of the little silken feet that once trod lightly, carelessly upon

it—why, at the bare ghost of those footsteps the tired old heart, if still on earth, will

> " Start and tremble. . . .
> And blossom in purple and red."

And if not still on earth—well, the God who made us knows, and He only—if a woman, at the last day, shall stand beside the man who loved her the best, or the man whom best she loved, to all eternity.

For, take the word of one who watches life aside, and thus sees more than others, it is not once in a million loves that the giver and the taker give and take equally. This is not in the books, but you who read, is it not in your lives ?

. . . . . .

The sun was not long up, next morning, when Sapphira dressed the woman of the sea, and brought her out to us. I remember that the palm-trees cast blue streaming shadows, and that the smell of wood smoke was in the air outside. Under the verandah eaves, where our raffle of beds and mosquito nets had just been cleared away, light shot in low yellow rays. They struck the girl's white feet as she came out of her room—she was wearing her silken stockings, washed and mended, but no shoes. I saw the small high insteps and the straight ankles, under one of Sapphira's loose cotton dresses ; all above was in dark of the roof—just the little feet, walking forward. . . . I cannot say how it moved me, knowing as I did the lost wandering mind of the girl, and the darkness of the road she travelled. . . . Then the full light from the entrance fell upon her, and we saw her.

She was tall, I thought—no, not tall, but she looked it, being so erect, and carrying herself so well. She had

dark hair that rose up and fell back in long curves, charmingly, and was knotted, after the fashion of those times, in a coil above each ear. Her face was more exquisitely shaped than any face I ever saw, save one or two of Da Vinci's saints; the line of cheek and chin was like a song. But it was not at all a saint's face; it was too warm and human. . . . White-rose-pale as she was, delicately shaped as a fairy, with clear amber eyes that seemed to float upon the paleness of her face, there was yet something I cannot name or describe in her whole presence that made me say to myself, as my eyes rested on her,

"This is a woman who can love." And immediately on it followed the thought—

"This is a woman who has not loved."

Need I say what the next thought was? Though I am a cripple, I am a man, but there is scarce a man in all the world who would not follow two such thoughts as those with the inevitable third—

"This woman shall love me."

Thought outflashes the electric spark. There was full time for all these things to pass through my mind, and for me to rouse myself from the momentary trance they cast me into, and to see, suddenly, the great lighthouse eyes of the surveyor shining on the girl with a look as if lamps had been lit up behind them, before Sapphira and our fairy maiden from the sea had taken three steps on to the verandah. I was conscious then of a little graceful bow that included all three of us, and of a slim white figure that looked tall and was not, standing with its hands charmingly at ease and in the right place, and a pretty courteous smile upon its face. Another thought flashed its way home.

"This is one of the little soldiers of Society."

You must not think, because I spent an embittered life at the far ends of the earth, dressed in rough cotton clothes, and never saw a claw-hammer coat from one year's end to another, that I did not know the "world where one amuses oneself." It must be remembered that my people were well off. I had, in my time, done my few years of the social conscription that every man should pay to his world. A man who spends his life attending social functions after five and twenty may be written down waster; but youth should bear the yoke of the manners that "maketh man." I am not one of those who gird at the world of pleasant things and smooth-spoken people, nor at the stamp that it sets, for life, upon its own.

Now the fairy girl bore that stamp, clear as the seal set upon wax by a chiselled gem. She was broken, drilled, to the line and rule of Society. She was trained. She would never show her feelings where feelings could be concealed; she would be courteous if she were dying at the stake; she would be unselfish, she would be brave. . . .

But if what I thought to be true indeed, and she was not only of the army, but of those who bear high command, she would have the defects of those fine qualities. To her I might be barely human, because I had once known, and remembered, certain shibboleths. Flower might be patronisable. Rocky Jim would be a person to offer tips to—if she were no Australasian, and I thought she was none. As for my poor brave Sapphira——

"Well, what will be, will be," I thought to myself; and stepped forward to take the fairy maiden's hand.

But I saw she was not holding it out.

"Won't you introduce me?" she said, with the little soldier smile that showed nothing, to Sapphira. And I remembered that in the world where one plays, people do not shake hands on being introduced.

Nothing could put Sapphira out—save ghosts.

"That's Mr. Owen Ireland," she said, pointing a regal finger at me. "That's Mr. James Todd. That's Mr. Flower."

The fairy girl met each name with a dainty little inclination of the head. But I saw the cloud grow and darken in her eyes, as she noticed that her own name was not spoken.

"Something wrong—somewhere," said the eyes.

She made a brave attempt. Without showing that she noticed Sapphira's apparent discourtesy in omitting her name, she came a little forward, and said in a pleasant tone,

"It's so hard to catch names, isn't it? I daresay you didn't quite catch mine. I am——"

She stopped dead, and I could see, and I saw that Flower too saw, she was making plucky attempts to hold herself together. But the bewilderment and the terror grew. She sat down suddenly, still keeping up the little smile, and changed the subject.

"What a charming view you have from your verandah—it is yours, Mrs. Gregg, isn't it?" she said. I noticed that she had Sapphira's name correctly, at all events.

Flower did not give Sapphira time to answer. He came over to the girl, and took a seat beside her.

"You mustn't make strangers of us," he said, in his big, burring voice, that I think all women liked. "We all know you've had an accident, and it's better for you

to take things just as they are.
name, and we don't know it, but
to bother you for a minute.
here, and you must just take
remember everything. You wil
and there's no cause to worry.'

"There is no cause to worry,'
see that she was trying to imp
that kept slight hold of facts as

"None," boomed Flower. '
and find out where your friends
back soon."

"Do you know," said the gi
erect, yet with a pitiful exp
somewhere in her eyes, "I don
anything—about them. Isn't i

"Not at all. You're sufferin
amnesia; loss of memory follo
have had a blow on the head, t

She felt her masses of soft h
white windflower.

"The bump is nearly gone,"

"I daresay the shock was the
been shipwrecked."

At the word she sprang to her feet.

"They've gone," she said, in a queer mechanical tone. "They went, in the boats. Ku-Ku Island. Finster Island, Caradoc Reefs, Disappointment Island, Ku-Ku Island."

"God!" swore Rocky Jim softly.

"Sit down," said Flower with extreme gentleness, taking her hand and drawing her back into her chair. "Don't worry."

"There is no cause to worry," she said promptly, repeating his own words of a few minutes before. And then, in the flat mechanical voice, "Finster Island, Caradoc Reefs, Disappointment Island, Ku-Ku Island."

"Time for your medicine," said Flower, watching her.

"Yes," she said brightly, but with a certain indrawing of the lips. ("She's been in the habit of taking medicine; out of health; voyaging for health," said my mind to me rapidly.) "They've gone," she went on. "In the boats. Finster Island——"

Sapphira had obeyed the surveyor's nod. Flower held to the lips of the girl what looked like a fairly stiff dose of whisky and water—for a fairy queen. She swallowed it at once, and suppressed the shuddering grimace that I knew she wanted to make.

"Now," said the surveyor, "you can go and take a little nap, because that will make you sleepy, and then I hope you'll come out and give us the pleasure of your company again."

"That's enough for the present," he said to Sapphira, as the girl disappeared, "but we must keep her with us as much as we can; she must not be allowed to brood."

"What was it you said she had?" asked Sapphira.

"I didn't say she had anything, I said she was showing a certain symptom—amnesia—that accompanies a great shock, at times."

"Her knees were as black as your hat," volunteered Sapphira unsuccessfully. "She has been banged about in the rocks something cruel."

"Did you learn that out surveying?" I asked him. If he was conscious of any sneer in my voice, he took no notice of it, as he replied,

"No. I went through the whole of my medical

course, except the taking of the degree, before I took up surveying."

Rocky Jim, with the eye of buying a horse, looked over Flower's mighty height. I know if he had been an American he would have held out his hand just then, and said, "Shake." Being a New Zealander, he only remarked,

"Weren't built for an indoor life, even the best sort, were you? Same way with myself."

"Same way with a lot of us in New Guinea," said Flower.

Sapphira, on the floor, looked from one to another. I don't know what may have been in the mind of that much married woman (Gregg had been last of three) regarding the two men beside her, but it seemed as if she were struggling with woman's immemorial jealousy of her rival, the world of outdoor work; for she jerked out, at this juncture, a contemptuous remark,

"None of you don't ever grow up. You're all like kids that would rather play in the dirt than anything else."

"Why, Sapphira," said Jim, "you yourself can handle a tommyhawk with any man, except he was a young man" (Jim was certainly too truthful for a successful squire of dames), "and you go off recruiting up the rivers in that canoe of yours for weeks."

"If I do, it's to make money, not because I like it," said Sapphira, unpacified. "I like what any woman—any person with *sense*—does like. That's good beds and clean floors, and table-cloths on your table, and starch in your clothes, and a place where you can sit and sew and watch the rain, and thank God you ain't got to go out in it. But men—in New Guinea—oh, it's there

you get back to where you belong in this country; you can be dirty" (I drew my unblacked boots under my chair) "and ragged" (we had done our best in honour of the mysterious girl, but there were dropped buttons and safety-pinned braces too many amongst the three; I think we all winced), "and you don't shave for weeks, unless it's when a bit of a skirt comes along" (every man's hand went unconsciously to his newly-scraped chin), "and you live in huts that isn't swept not when you can grow potatoes on the floors, and only come into those to sleep and eat, and eat it on a packing-case with a newspaper six months old for tablecloth. I know the lot of you." (With increasing speed to the end.)

Jim, the incorrigible, whistled.

"Both men and women originally sprang from monkeys," he quoted, "but the women sprang farther than the men." He reached forward, and laid a roughish caress on Sapphira's cabled crown. "Go slow, old girl," he advised. "We aren't all gorillas."

Sapphira rose with some dignity, though swiftly, and remarked that if we had no work to do, which men never did seem to have, she had, and must ask us kindly to excuse her. On which she went off kitchenwards.

There fell a silence. Each man was waiting for another man to break it. I looked at Rocky Jim; he looked at the floor. The misnamed Percival looked at nobody and nothing; his eyes seemed to have set themselves upon something invisible, a little behind my head.

I looked at Jim again, at Flower again. These men of the wilderness were too strong for me. They could have sat silent through a night and a day. I could not. I spoke what was in the minds of all.

"She's given us the direction of the island."

"She has," said Flower.

"Who'd have thought it?" asked Jim tritely, after another pause. "Just there—where people must have been passing over and over again."

"That was Ku-Ku's cleverness," I said. "Do you know the map about here?" to Flower.

"Probably better than you do," was his composed reply; and I remembered that a surveyor was likely to make himself familiar with the lie of the coast. "Finster, Caradoc, Disappointment—they lie in a sort of slanting string, north-westwardly."

"There are several islands of no importance lying beyond."

"It'll be one of those," suggested Jim.

"Very possibly," answered Flower.

Jim was musing. By and by he burst out into a great fit of laughter.

"What a cunning old boy it was!" he crowed, wiping his eyes. "When people were looking away out beyond the Engineers' and down to Rossel, there he was, as snug as a bug in a rug, within two days' sail of the mainland in anything you like to name!"

"Two days in a decent boat, not a canoe," corrected Flower. "If what the girl said was correct——" He paused a minute to unfasten his map case, and take out a chart. "If what she said was right," he went on, looking at the map, while Jim and I hung over his shoulders, "it must lie somewhere north-eastward of the Lusancays. Near two hundred miles from Ku-Ku's village on the mainland."

We hung gazing at the chart. I am one of the men—perhaps you are another, there are many of them—to

whom a map of any kind is inexplicably attractive. I can "read" one of Hampshire or Queen's County for an hour at a time, if there isn't anything better to be had. But give me an immense Phillips, with its lovely blue seas and green and buff and pink countries, shaded with creeping caterpillars of mountain ranges, and you need not call me for meals. I always thought the map of New Guinea the most delightful reading in the world. Its names alone, running down from Port Moresby to the east end, are full of the romance of the South Seas, and of wild days not yet dead.

Caution Bay, Bootless Inlet, Beagle Bay, Hood Point, Keppel Bay, Cloudy Bay, Orangerie Bay—it is almost poetry. . . . And the island world of the east country—the great D'Entrecasteaux and Louisiades; the Conflicts; Joannet; Coral Haven, Bramble Haven, Duchateau Entrance, Horaki-Raki and Wuri-Wuri Passages . . . you can see them by their names alone. Even one who has never sailed the Coral Sea, never been north of Cape York Peninsula, can feel that these places must be what they are—iris-blue islets floating in air that is like glass or like gold, you scarce can say which—white beaches combed by league-long breakers—high towers and palaces of purple palms, tradewind-driven, leaning over shores where not even the solitary footprint of Crusoe's island marks the sands between the sweep of tide and tide—shallows of flaming green, that turn the clouds above them to their own strange hue—sun and sun and sun, and the salt on your lips, and the magnificent solitude of a world where the seas and the winds, and the tangling, treacherous tideways, are almost all, and man is almost nought. . . . That is East New Guinea.

Flower rolled up the map, and we went back to our chairs. By common consent, pipes were lighted. The smoke curled up under Sapphira's high peaked roof.

"What gets me," said Rocky Jim, after a pause, "is that it's all too blanky easy to be right." He took his pipe out of his mouth, looked into the bowl as if for inspiration, and put it back again.

"How do you mean?" I asked. But the surveyor understood.

"There's something in that," he said. "It's a law of nature that no good thing is easily had."

"I reckon!" agreed Jim. "Gold, now. The way Providence has hidden it away—and put it in difficult and dangerous countries—and made it hard to find——"

"Aren't you confusing cause and effect?" I asked. "Gold is surely valuable just because it's difficult to get."

"No," contradicted Flower, who seemed to be always in opposition to me at present. "Jim's right. It's chiefly the qualities of gold—non-corrosiveness, unequalled ductile properties, apart from its beauty—that have made it valued. There are plenty of rare metals not worth twopence a pound."

Jim looked at the two of us, and I wonder, now, how much he saw with those childlike blue eyes of his.

"We're getting bushed," he remarked. "I thought we were talking about the way to Ku-Ku's Island. Anyway, I was. And I was saying that I don't like the way the thing pans out, because it's too easy. There's bound to be a catch somewhere or other. If the place were as easy to get at as all that, some of the natives would have found it since Ku-Ku died. Or a white man—there's a fair handful of whites this end of the

country." (You must remember that I am writing of a time now past; in those days, long before the war, a "handful" was a bad description of New Guinea's eastern population.)

"Don't see where the catch is," I put in. "This girl has evidently been thrown ashore from a wreck of some sort, though none of us can make out just how it came about. She has told us, accidentally, that someone, or some people, from the ship she was on, went away in the boats—apparently deserting her; nice sort of people they must have been—and made for Ku-Ku's Island. She repeats, like a child that has heard something it doesn't understand, a chain of something that must be sailing directions. I judge the men kept saying the directions over and over again, to impress them on their minds."

"Can't you see what that points to?" broke in Flower.

I was silent. I hate being interrupted; besides, I did not see. Jim looked puzzled a minute, and then broke out,

"Why, yes, blanky blank blank it! a blessed what-d'ye-call-it would see that." (Jim meant nothing—he never did—but he does not stand verbatim reporting.) "The etcetera what-is-its were in the boat when they were talking like that; they had nothing to write it down on."

"Well, if they were," I suggested, "she must have been with them, or she couldn't have heard it, so they can't have been quite as bad as you make them out."

Jim looked worried; he was apparently very far from wishing to whitewash the men who had brought our Sea-Lady to the straits in which we found her.

"They were blanky cows, anyhow," he concluded.

"Cows or not," said Flower, "they were making for the island a hundred to one, and a thousand to one they're there now."

"Then, if they were," I said ruefully, "our chance is gone."

"I don't know," said Jim, looking at the top of my head in what seemed to me a very haughty manner.

"How do you suppose we're going to get there? The *Tagula* goes up to Mambaré this time; she isn't due for weeks. By that time the men will have about cleaned out the place."

"I don't know," said Jim again, and now he seemed to have grown so scornful that his glance carried right over my head, and fixed itself beyond.

"What are you staring at?" I asked him irritably. God help me, I am irritable at times. You would be.

"The *Tagula*," said Jim.

I jumped to my feet. Flower, who had been facing in the same direction, looked out, like Jim, over the verandah rail. We all saw the schooner. She had come back.

"What can have brought her?" I breathed.

"Whatever it is," said Jim, "I know what'll take her away, and where to. There's our chance for the island."

CHAPTER III

THE MAN FROM THE WRECK

JIM was off in a burst down on to the beach. There was not the slightest need for hurry, but I think the gold-rush feeling had got hold of him—Rocky Jim had been among the first on every field in Papua, as it "broke out"—and he was evidently suffering from a recrudescence of the excitement that comes in gold-rush days. There was something of value hidden away; other people as well as himself were out after it; it was his job to get there first. . . . I do not mean that Jim intended to steal a march on Flower and myself. In this matter we were his "mates," and what a mate means to a Papuan gold-miner has often been written in letters of self-sacrifice and heroism that far outshines the gold. But he was very eager indeed to meet the Captain of the *Tagula* as he came up the walk from the beach, and to tell him, before the man had time to say what brought him back, that he wanted to charter him and his boat at once.

"There's no knowing," said Jim to me, as I caught him up where he waited—I had been coming slowly, since a slow pace allows me almost to conceal my lameness. "The news may have got out somewhere else." And he was at Captain Carl the moment that red-faced seaman hove fairly into sight underneath the windy, flying shadows of the palms.

I wonder why the shadows of palm-trees blown by the wind are homeless and sad? They are—on the brightest day, beside the bluest sea. Their shadows flickered over my heart that day, as I went slowly down the palm-tree walk behind Jim, for whom all things were possible. . . .

By the time I got up again, Jim had unpacked about half his story, and come to the most interesting part. "She don't know who she is, or where she came from, no more than if she'd just slid down from heaven on a rainbow," he was saying. Carl, that good, inarticulate Swede, was standing with his two hands politely clasped in front of him, staring at Jim, and nodding now and then through the midst of the river of talk, as a man swimming rapids might occasionally raise up his head out of the foam. . . .

"And all she can say," he went on, using something of poetic license—for the Lady of the Sea had said a good deal more—"is, 'Finster Island, Disappointment Reefs, Caradoc Island, Ku-Ku Island.'"

He drew back, looking under his "banged" hair with an expression of "Now then."

"Yes, inde-eed?" asked Carl politely. "Ant that is all she say?"

"Isn't it enough? What do you make of it, man?"

"I make off-it the course I haff taken through the Lusancays, sometimes." He stood waiting.

"Ku-Ku Island, man! Ku-Ku Island, where all the red shell and shell-money is."

"You want to sharter the *Tagula* for Ku-Ku Island?"

"If we can find it. There's a fortune in it."

"The sharge I make for the *Tagula* is two pounds fifteen a day, and you shall always furnish the stores."

"Come up to the house, you old shell-fish," said Jim

lovingly, flinging his arm over Carl's substantial shoulder. "Sapphira has some whisky that'll lift your soul out by the roots, if you have a soul." He was obviously chagrined by the impassivity of his friend the Swede. I felt a little more than chagrined. I thought the much discussed "catch" was not far away. By how much—how very much—I was out, the story must tell.

"Certainly I haff a soul; I am a member of the Lutheran Ref-formed Shurch," Carl was saying. He always answered every question you might put to him. I had hardly time to reflect that the corollary to be drawn from his remarks was hardly flattering to other religious persuasions, before I reached the verandah behind Carl and Rocky Jim. Flower had temporarily vanished. To give every man his due, I never met anyone possessed of finer tact.

Sapphira produced the whisky, as she would have produced it in the presence of half a dozen Government officers (I always thought there must have been an unspoken conspiracy among them all not to give her away), and Carl drank it with an unmoved countenance. I knew that brand and kept off.

"So you want to sharter my boat?" the captain asked, putting down his glass, and looking as if its contents had "loosened him up a bit"—as Jim would have put it.

"We do want to. We want to get to Ku-Ku Island, and shut down on the stuff that's there, before those"—he described them—"can get their claws on it and sail away again. We think they hadn't anything but a ship's boat, so it oughtn't to be difficult."

"Yess," was the captain's reply.

"You needn't think you'll be out of it. We'll take

Carl in—won't we?" he appealed to the rest of the party. Flower had come back at just the right minute, and was sitting astride Sapphira's big table, his chin in his hand, his queer great eyes fixed on Captain Carl.

"Of course," I said, and Flower came in with, "Of course, if he wants it."

Carl looked somewhat brighter. Then a shadow came down. "I haff not said I will sharter, yet," he observed.

"But man, you must"—from Jim. "We mean to have that stuff. And we really know—or we can guess—where it is."

"Yess. Maybe I shall sharter her to you if you can findt a captain."

"A captain! But——"

"What's the objection?" asked Flower curtly, his eyes still on Carl's red, simple face. The captain turned to him, as to the master of the situation, and answered plainly,

"Be-causs I do not want to go blindt."

"Oh, koi-koi!" yelled Jim, using the emphatic Motuan word for "nonsense." "You don't never believe all that rubbish—why, it's nothing but pouri-pouri" (native magic).

"Maybe," said Carl, unmoved. "But I haff seen that Orokiva man who came back from the islandt when he was a little kid, and when I haff seen him he was a man grown up, and he hadn't any seeing at all. Now if I have no seeing, I can't work my ship, and I am no use for to cut up for bait for fishes."

"But it's impossible nonsense."

"Yess, I think so. All the same I do not want to go."

"Look here," put in Flower, "how would it be if you didn't land on the place when you found it, just took the

ship up, and stood off and on till you were wanted again?"

Carl seemed to consider.

"Yess, I will do that," he said. "But it will not be honest then that you give me a share."

"We'll see you don't lose; you can trust us," declared Jim.

"Thank you," said Captain Carl. He paused to see if anyone had anything else to say. But we were run out for the moment.

After making sure that the way was clear, the captain took up the word; Sapphira had come out from the inner room, and was standing beside me. He addressed himself to her, with a slight bow.

"Mrs. Gregg, I hope you don't mindt that I bring a det body to your house."

"A dead body?" replied Sapphira, with the utmost calmness. "Whose?" She spoke much as if Carl had found a purse or an umbrella, and was bent on returning it to its owner.

"I don't know, Mrs. Gregg. I haff foundt it in the sea, and it iss not the body of anyone off this country. And I think, bef-fore I bury it, perhaps I hadt better show it to some whites, so they can see how he is like, and maybe tell someone who may ask for him."

"Very sensible," said Flower. "So that was what brought you back?" He spoke as an old acquaintance; and indeed he and Carl had seen much of each other, during the surveyor's travels up and down the coast.

"Yes. I shall ask my boyce to bring him up to the house, and all you shall look at it, and I shall then have him buriedt."

"Bring him along," said Jim.

"I think they bring him now," remarked the captain. And indeed, up the long walk of palms, there came a slow procession; four native boys in scarlet cotton kilts, carrying a long bundle wrapped in a mat.

"How long has he been in the water?" I asked apprehensively. I had not the nerve of Flower and Rocky Jim for unpleasant sights.

"Not long," answered Carl reassuringly. "About two dace."

"Two days!" The same thought struck us all. "Drowned, of course?"

"I don't know," replied Carl cautiously. "He hass been sticked with a knife."

"Then it's murder," pronounced Sapphira with a certain relish. She had the delight of her class in tales of blood. I could see regret welling up in her face at the thought that here was no delightful possibility, such as should have been in a civilised place, of inquest, coroner and jury; of policemen taking notes, and herself, Sapphira, gloriously aloft in the witness-box, hereafter to be described in the papers as "Sapphira Gregg, Married Woman," with a column of leaded question and answer following. . . .

Yes, I think that was Sapphira's regretful vision. But as for Flower, Rocky Jim, and myself, we had but one thought amongst us. Two days ago fixed the time of the wreck. This was certainly another victim. Would he furnish a clue?

The boys brought up their burden, and laid it on the verandah floor. Carl unroped the mat, and pulled it aside, and showed . . .

I don't know what I had been expecting, but it was certainly not what I saw. The man who lay so quiet

on the verandah floor under our staring eyes was not the sort of man one would have expected to find as shipmate with our Sea Princess. He was a Southern European, Italian, Spanish, or Greek—very dark, with a black moustache and a black unshaven chin. He was dressed in the roughest of cotton clothing, and was barefoot. His shirt was deeply stained all down one side with a dark red patch that not even the sea had availed to wash away. Carl drew the garment aside, and we saw a bluish, depressed cut in the skin below. It seemed a small thing to have let out the life of a man, yet somehow I was sure, and so, I felt, were the others, that this creature had not met with his death in the arms of the merciful sea.

I don't know how long we stood round the poor dead thing in its rough shirt and trousers, with its stiff yellow feet sticking up apart; I suppose it was only a few seconds. But there was a silence while we looked, a reverent silence, I think and hope. Jim, who had been a Catholic some time long ago, crossed himself, and mechanically murmured a Latin word or two.

Then there came a voice behind us, sweet and golden-clear as only the voice of a cultivated woman can be,

"What are you all looking at? May I see?"

Sapphira promptly got in front of the girl, who was just coming from the inner room, and spread her ample skirts out.

"You go back," she threw over her shoulder. "It's no sight for you and won't do you no good."

"You let her, Sapphira," said Jim. "There's more in this than meets the eye. It may help us to find out who she is."

The girl stood quite still, her large eyes looking

incredibly larger. She seemed frightened, and yet anxious to know. . . .

Flower said nothing, but he watched her. Sapphira stood back.

I expected that she would scream or faint, but I had forgotten her drill. She did not come of the class that gives way. I saw her turn extremely pale, but she stood quite still, looking down at the dead man.

"Have you seen him before?" asked Flower.

"Yes," said the girl. Then, with the painful puzzled look coming back, "I can't remember."

"You must try," said the surveyor, cruelly, as I thought. "Try if you can recall anything about him. It may be important."

She put both hands to the sides of her forehead, where they sank almost out of sight among the rich waves of her hair. It was painful to see her straining and struggling; her lips trembled, and the lids of her closed eyes (she had shut them when she made her effort) were all wrinkled up at the corners. But no words came.

Flower came over to where she was standing, and laid his hand on her arm. I felt I could have struck him.

"Listen," he said imperatively. "Open your eyes." She opened them. "Think. Did they go in the boat?"

"They're gone," she said. "They went in the boat. But—not this." She pointed to the stain, and I could see her crush down a shudder.

"Did you go in the boat?" asked Flower in a low, determined tone. I saw he was holding her hands now, and fixing his eyes on hers, and it struck me suddenly that he was hypnotising her. He had personality enough to hypnotise a herd of elephants; I hated to

see it, and yet I could not help thinking that he was bound to succeed.

Her answer was far away from anything I, or I think Flower himself had expected. She looked right into his eyes, as no doubt he was willing her to do, and replied in a dull, dreamy voice,

"When they came back I did not want to go."

"Did you go in the boat?" repeated Flower. If he had asked me anything in that tone, I should have yielded up my very soul—hating him, perhaps, all the time. I heard Captain Carl draw his breath hard, and saw his blue sailor eyes fix themselves on the pair.

Her answer came slowly.

"After they took me I jumped overboard, and it was too rough . . . and when I swam, the waves went over, and I was dead."

"You jumped overboard?"

The next words electrified us all. In a tone of voice that was almost caressing, she answered,

"Yes, Cedric."

Flower dropped her hands as though they were white-hot. The hypnotic chain was instantly broken. I saw the expressions that chased each other over his face—amazement, anger, jealousy, and then the sickness of a sudden, cruel blow—before the big man shut down the blind that commonly concealed his emotions.

Cedric!

If she had fired a pistol at his breast, she could not have done more damage than she did with this one word, spoken in the tone that she had used. I knew, instantly, that Flower, in those two days, had let himself fall—there is no other word for it—down far and deep in love with our princess from the sea. And,

knowing as I did that my own love must count for little, I was cruelly glad of his rebuff.

But Captain Carl was thinking of other things than love. He had cast a glance of hearty sailorly admiration on the girl when she came in, and had then returned to the business in hand. He had listened to Flower's questioning, and evidently decided in his own mind that it led to nothing.

"Well," he said, "I am sorry that this young lady cannot help us; I think she iss wandering, for we are not any of uss namedt Cedric. You haff all looked well, so you can des-scribe him, if someone asks?"

"Yes," answered Jim for the party. "We'll know the beggar when we meet him again."

"Boyce!" called Carl to the boys. "Take him away." The natives stepped on to the verandah; they bent to replace the mats. . . .

"Now, my Gawt, but I am stupid," said the Captain self-reproachfully. "I haff forgotten this." He bent over the corpse, and turned up one hand, exposing the hidden little finger, and a ring.

"It iss no good to bury this," he said, working at the swollen joint.

I have not mentioned it, but I may say now that the body was showing signs that seemed to point to a speedy burial as necessary and desirable. I was afraid of what might happen; I turned away.

"Sapphira," I said, "don't let her look any more. . . ."

But the girl was bending over the corpse with dilated eyes, watching Carl as he worked at the ring. It came off, luckily without mishap, and lay in his hand. He turned it over.

"I think it not worth very much," he said

consideringly. "I haven't known that stone." It was a curious pale pink gem, about the size of a small young pea, held by a singularly neat claw setting.

"It might be an amethyst," suggested Jim, who, like most gold-miners, held all gems in high contempt.

"Amethyst your granny," was Sapphira's contribution. "When Bartle and me—that was my first—was on the Queensland gem country, they didn't put no cheap stones in rings made like that."

"Perhaps it's a——" I was beginning, when the Sea-Lady stepped forward, and took the ring out of Carl's unresisting hold. Without a second glance at it, she slipped it on the third finger of her left hand, drew a long sigh, and disappeared into the bedroom behind.

Carl swore a strange sea-oath.

"She's madt, you tell me," he said, "but I think there's what you call methodt in that madtness."

"Can't you see," said Flower, speaking for the first time since the girl had called him "Cedric," "that it's her ring? As to its being an amethyst, or anything like that—I know something of crystallography. . . . I'm much mistaken if it isn't a pink diamond."

"My oath!" commented Sapphira. "Well, I seen it flash like—like—like a flash," she concluded lamely. "What would it be worth?"

"Pink diamonds of such a colour are worth anything you like to say," was Flower's reply. I could see that he was not well pleased. Did he connect the valuable, beautiful ring on that third finger with "Cedric"?

("But you know," I was saying to myself, "I was quite sure—and I am—that she has never really loved. It shows in the eyes. . . .")

Carl, dismissing all subtleties—if indeed he had been

conscious that any were in the air—remarked, "Well, Mr. Flower, it's your responsibility," called "Boyce!" once more, and had the sad still thing wrapped up and taken away.

"If you don't mind, I will haff him buriedt in your groundts, Mrs. Gregg," he said, pausing on the verandah steps to sweep off his hat and bow to Sapphira. "Some off these local natives haff bad habits of digging people up."

"Bless you, you may do as you please; if you'll plant him down among the cabbages, everybody'll be the better of it," replied Sapphira amiably—causing me to register a silent vow against the eating of Sapphira's excellent cabbages at any future time.

And the dark-faced man who had been known to the Sea-Lady, who had worn her ring and, with his evil companions, driven her from God knows what of horror to all but certain death in the stormy waves—was taken, silent, to his last long sleep. And I for one, with his going, almost lost hope of ever unravelling the mystery that had wound itself about the girl from the sea.

Carl came back again prosaically anxious for dinner, and Sapphira rose nobly to her reputation as the finest cook in the bush country of New Guinea. I recollect that we had bush turkey, stuffed with native chestnut, and I think there was sea-slug soup, and a jelly of pale red sago from the sago swamp behind the house, served with cocoanut cream. Flower, to whom these delicacies were new, ate them with appreciation. Jim told me, during one of Sapphira's eclipses in the kitchen, that he'd rather have a real chop and a real potato than the whole of it; but he was very careful not to let our hostess hear.

"She's bosker, Sapphira is," he confided to me behind a weatherworn hand, one eye nervously watching the kitchen door. "Bosker, she is. But you've got to appreci-ate her. She don't like not being appreci-ated, and you'd best keep it to yourself if there's anything you'd rather was otherwise. Unless you aren't particular about saucepans or teapots in your hair."

"We all like to be appreciated," I said vaguely. I was watching the Sea-Lady, and feeling reminiscent of the old days rising out of their graves, as I saw the delicate way of her eating. Not so did even the best of our Papuan society take its food. . . .

Sapphira and the boy cleared the table, as Jim whispered to me, "like they say the devil went through Athlone—in standin' leps." It seemed to me, certainly, as if our hostess were in a hurry about something.

As soon as the last trayful had been slammed jinglingly down on the kitchen table, she took a couple of steps down the verandah, walking much as Lady Macbeth may have done when she stepped forward to claim the daggers, and remarked, centre of stage,

"*Now* we'll talk."

When Sapphira took command, you might as well give up the helm at once, and go down to smoke a pipe in the cabin. Metaphorically speaking, we all did. It seemed to be understood that the *Tagula* was not going forth, nor Flower going out to work, again to-day; neither was Jim returning to the goldfields track, or I to my killing-bottle and traps. Other and weightier matters were afoot. . . . That is another of the privileges we at the back of the world enjoy; we can twist the clock and the calendar about to serve our purposes. Sunday is Saturday or Monday if we want;

Christmas, Easter, or any other feast becomes "movable" indeed if the call of a steamer happens to hit it in the wind, and shove it forward a day or two, or back a week. . . . I've known all the traders of Niue (you do not want to know where Niue is, so you shall not) agree to shut up their stores together for two days, and go picnicking, because they felt like it. I've known Samarai (you shall hear where that is; it is the second town of Papua) run a Majesty's birthday and a festival of the Anglican Church into unnatural conjunction, chain-gang an extraneous Bank Holiday on, and make a Roman-Australian holiday out of the butchery.

So no one, away on Croker Island, made any bones about dropping all business for a time.

"I suppose you think," said Sapphira, from her usual throne on the floor, "that I'm going to talk about Ku-Ku's Island. No, I'm not. Except by and by. What I want to know is, what steps are you highly-educated gentlemen going to take to find out who this young lady is, and who she belongs to. Seems to me, if I left it to you, she'd stay here till cocoanut trees dropped pineapples, before anyone did anything. But then, I'm in——"

I have been certain ever since that Rocky Jim knocked the bottle on to the floor by no accident. But Sapphira thought he did. There was an interval of duster, of boy, and of brief, biting lecture concerning the value of good drinks, and the sin of wasting them. Then, in a gradually diminishing odour of smeared whisky, peace returned.

I thought it was time I came in.

"It's perfectly simple," I said. "There's been a shipwreck somewhere, and she was cast ashore, after

jumping out of a boat that got away from the wreck. If we can't trace any survivors, we shall only have to wait till the next mails come up from south. The papers will have an account of the wreck, and a list of the missing passengers. That will settle everything."

"It sounds very well," said Flower, "but you must remember that no liner runs within three hundred miles, except the *Moresby*, and she went down to Sydney just before I came, so she's two thousand miles away. All the same, you're right in saying that the papers will probably tell us something."

"Can't the young lady haff been in some ship?" asked Captain Carl.

"Not much she hasn't," said Sapphira. "With the dress she was wearing when she came here. . . . Why, man, she must have been at a dance or something. It was all gold and passementerie. And"—rapidly, in a sort of ecstatic trance—"there was appliquey and insertion of something that was real Venice—or-I'll-eat-it—all over the tablierr, and the skirt was nine-gored, and the way the biases was done would make you think an angel had had the scissors—there was a bolero, Venice foundation with sequins and silk motiffs on top; oh, the tablierr was mostly fillet, I forgot that—it was false-hemmed with gold cabling, and there was just a fish-tail on the skirt, no more——"

("God be with us, did she think there would be fins?" queried Jim in a bewildered whisper. I shook my head at him.)

—"And there was revers of self, all round, just where it flared. And they was held down with sort of accordioned tabs, each with a——"

Rocky Jim got up from his seat. He walked round to

the place where Sapphira was sitting on the floor, hands outspread and working in the air, autumnal-fiery eyes aglow, lips going like the nose of a rabbit. He took her by the hands, and lifted her to her feet with one swing. I felt—as I often felt—a pang go through me at the sight of his strength, and its easy, unconscious use.

She went on talking.

—"Button sort of herringboned round in them iridescent sequins. The foundation was——"

"Take an ex-married man's advice, and let her run down," counselled Flower, with a twinkle in his eye.

"My Gawt! My Gawt!" I heard Carl saying to himself, in a thankful kind of tone. He was unmarried, as we knew.

"Think I can't stop a woman's tongue?" queried Rocky Jim, the man known to fear neither alligator, shark, nor cannibal.

"Let me finish. It had a foundation of glassy, with a balayoose all round the——"

Jim bent from his six feet height, and kissed her on the lips, a long, determined, I might say smacking kiss. Sapphira paused for one moment, to wrench herself from his grasp with a twist worthy of Japanese Ju-jitsu, deliver a box on the ear that made the miner reel, and call out, loud and rapidly, like a phonograph running down,

"It had a balayoose—and the silk of that was knife-pleated first, and then ruched and the corsage was eased *here*, and fulled *there*. The tucker was medallions with beading on top gold drawstring there was a small Medici transparent with Venice on fillet the fastenings was underarm and the petersham was reel white satin with

the name of the place in gold letters now then Mister Smart can you stop a lady saying what she wants to say?"

"I'm glad I didn't," said Jim coolly. "It's given me an idea. Get us out that dress, won't you, and let us see the Paul-what-is-it——"

"Petersham!" snapped Sapphira.

"Where the gold letters are. We might make something out of that."

But we didn't. When the wreck of the Sea-Lady's dress was produced, and the satin waistband exposed to view, we saw that one of the many rents had carried away half the maker's name. Only "Modiste . . . Rue de la Paix" remained. And that told us nothing at all, for Paris toilets go the world around.

"It *has* a balayoose," persisted Sapphira, with a victorious glance at Jim, holding up something that might have been a trail of tangled seaweed. She was clearly gloating over his defeat.

Jim said nothing at all, but—I blush for my manhood to repeat it—he took out his handkerchief, and in Sapphira's full sight, deliberately—wiped his mouth.

The pioneer heroine laid down the dress, turned round and disappeared. I saw her, as she vanished down the steps of the back verandah, passionately tearing the hairpins out of her hair, and—knowing Sapphira—I was prepared for the distant echo of fierce sobbing that stole into the strange quiet of our front verandah retreat, soon after she had fled.

Nobody took the slightest notice. Carl plunged at once into an estimate of times and distances, stores, mileage, and prevailing winds. Jim and I listened to him, asking a question now and then. Flower seemed

to give us his attention only by fits and starts; he was busy with a bit of paper, making calculations.

By and by he raised his head. I have the picture of the verandah clear in my mind. We were in what seemed a cave of black velvet shadow. Outside, the fringes of the thatch were cut into silhouettes against a sky of brass-hard blue. There was a blaze of white sand in front, pencilled with restless, thin shadows of palms. There was a flare of green, where the low bush joined the shore. There was the lapping edge of the lagoon water, and far out, white surf that crumbled on the reef. Beyond illimitable blue, the tradeless, timeless, almost untravelled plains of New Guinea's Coral Sea.

. . . Green, white and blue—they are the colours, the flag of The Islands—that wide Pacific world that stretches from Tahiti to Cape York. The world where old men are young, and young men strangely old. The world where ten years pass as a day, and a day stretches out to ten years, and when the ten years are over, they are a life—for no man can eat the fruits of the islands ten years and go back to the world again. The islands have him then, and they hold.

Green, white and blue—the fiery green of the forests and the bush, the blue of sea, the white of coral sand . . . there are no colours like them beyond the island world. Beside these pictures painted in gems and flame, the rest of the earth grows pale. No other region has the right to bear this flag. It is ours.

I don't know that Flower was thinking of these things—though he had plenty of feeling for natural beauty—when he raised his head, and looked long and thoughtfully out to sea. I saw that some matter of moment held his mind. Carl was explaining to Jim and

myself why you must always take half as many stores again as you think you will need, travelling these uncertain and unchartered seas in a vessel without steam power. "Ant," he was explaining, "the boyce that I haff for crew will not be enough, if we shall stay out a long——"

Flower looked round.

"Just a minute," he said. "There's something of importance. Todd, you've told me several times that there is something of value on Ku-Ku's Island besides the shell and shell-money."

"Carl knows more about that, I reckon," said Jim.

"I don't know much," deprecated the captain. "There was my countryman, Svensson, he hass found an island that was worth some value, a good many yearce ago, and I think it was near the Lusancays. But Mr. Diamond from Port Morceby, he haff heard of it and he went to the Landss Office and applied for it, and he guesst at the position, but he has not guesst right. Then Svensson, of course, he won't tell him where, and he won't make no applications, and so it stay till Svensson die. And no one haff it. But there was some said it was Ku-Ku's Islandt."

"Diamond is dead," explained Jim. "Killed by a fall from a horse. If he had any possible claim it's gone."

"A vile trick," commented Flower.

"When it is anything about islandts, they all go madt," said Carl. "And after all, islandts is not so much worth. But I haff heard offten that Ku-Ku Island hass something, but no one knows what."

"Well," said Flower, "I sincerely hope it has, since the shell-money will be practically valueless if we get it."

"Valueless!" cried Jim. "They said the old beggar had thousands of pounds' worth hidden there."

"It's likely enough that he had; the Trobriand Islanders seem to have done some slave-keeping in the past, and I daresay Ku-Ku made them work. But if we got all he ever made, it would not be worth more than a very few hundred pounds."

"Why?" I think we all asked together.

"Very simple. Because the money has no actual currency except among New Guinea natives."

"Well! you can buy anything from them with it—shell, pearls, copra, bêche-de-mer—whatever they have. Man, I tell you they'd rather have it than cash."

"Yes. And if you flooded the market with a big discovery, it would have much the same effect as flooding the world with gold. The purchasing power would go down with a thump. There's no fortune in shell-money. I doubt if New Guinea could ever carry more than three hundred pounds' worth at once. If a coin of it is worth fourpence, it doesn't at all follow that ten thousand coins will be worth ten thousand fourpences. That's elementary. Can't you see?"

We did see, and it was as if Flower had dropped an explosive bomb on the table. Our thoughts were shattered.

"Why, then—then . . ." stammered Jim.

Carl sucked the end of a pencil with which he had been writing his list. He seemed a little disappointed, not much.

"You will perhaps not want the sharter of the *Tagula*," he suggested.

"Yes, we shall," said Flower unexpectedly. "I think it's good enough. My impression is that the old

cannibal took rather more than enough trouble to keep people away. I don't think it was red shell alone. The native, all the world over, does try to keep the white man out of his secret when he finds anything that he knows will bring white settlement in a hurry. I don't blame him, poor beggar—but there it is. Ku-Ku shut the door so very fast that I think there has been something good behind it."

"The island's always been described as very small," suggested Jim.

"That may exclude gold, but not other things."

"What things?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Flower in the tone of a man who does know. "Time enough to see when we arrive. When do you think you can get us away, Carl?"

"To-morrow, I think. But that dependts on the wind. The windts on this coast, they are very uncertain." He began a discourse on the winds, to which I did not listen. It did not seem to me that I was concerned in it. If I had known just what this matter of winds was going to mean to us. . . .

The question now arose whether we were to take the girl with us. Carl's schooner, though slow, was a good comfortable boat, with a two-berth stateroom, as well as a cabin, fitted with the usual bunks. We could of course leave her in Sapphira's charge, at the store, provided Sapphira had not set her heart on accompanying the expedition. But I was almost sure she had. Flower, besides, was of opinion that the girl would run more chance of recovering her memory by going than by staying. She might, he said, find her mind return to its normal condition if she were confronted with some of the men who had carried her off in the boat. Already

we had gathered some small information from her encounter with the corpse of one of these men. A living villain, able to use his tongue, might even without his own goodwill recall to her everything that we wished to know.

I trusted more to the newspapers from south than anything else, but Flower seemed to expect little in that direction.

"It's a chance," he said, "no more—and in any case, we can't get them for nearly three months, the way the boats are running now. It's the *Morinda's* time for docking, you must remember; she'll be weeks later than usual. No, the shortest cut, in my opinion, is to take her with us."

At this point we were interrupted by the kitchen boy, carrying a pile of ironed clothes on his arm.

"Taubada, where Mary?" he demanded.

"What name (which) Mary?" I said.

"Mary. 'Nother Mary. Me givem him clothes."

"Oh—Mary, she stop along inside," I directed him. "He means the—the girl. It's the pigeon-English for woman," I explained to Flower.

"I think," was his answer, "the boy has solved a problem for us. We can't go on calling her 'the girl' as if she were a lodging-house slavey. She's not a day over nineteen, so she can't much mind answering to a Christian name, and there isn't any more Christian name than Mary to be found."

"There is not," said Jim, crossing himself. She came in at that very moment, and he asked her straight away, "Would you mind being called Mary, as we don't know your name?"

"I should like it very much," she said gravely. "I

seem to remember something about the word . . . something good."

"My heavens," said Rocky Jim aside. Then, "Don't you remember your religion, whatever it was?"

"Religion?" she said doubtfully. "Some of the words tire me so. . . That's one that tires me, but I know it's something good. Religion—God. . . ."

I saw her flowerlike hands clasp themselves together, all unconsciously, in the attitude of prayer.

"God," she said, trying to remember. "God—I've heard you say it." She turned to Rocky Jim. He flushed crimson from chin to forehead.

"You'll never hear me say it again," he told her. "Not the way you have heard me."

"I have heard you say it a great many times," she repeated consideringly. "God—hell—devil—damnation. They don't all seem the same."

Jim blushed nearly black, and looked down at the floor as if he hoped to discover a trap-door through which he might disappear. Finding none, he pulled himself together, and said, looking straight at Mary,

"They aren't the same, and I oughtn't to have said them, not when you were close at hand in a rotten native house like this. Don't you say them."

"Are you not good?" she asked him, her beautiful eyes, gold-brown like wallflowers in the sun, fixed earnestly on his. The word "good," I had long since noticed, was strangely overworked in her vocabulary. A travelled, cultivated girl from Mary's class of society has many thousands of words in her ordinary store. The accident and shock that had taken away her memory, had largely reduced that store. "Good" with

her, meant not only morally good, but pleasant, desirable, agreeable, a dozen other things. . . .

Jim, however, perceived no such shades.

"No, I'm not," he answered simply. "I'm not d——, not very bad, you understand; but good—H—— Heavens, I mean, no, I'm not good."

His complexion, that had paled to its natural tan, turned slowly red again.

Mary, with that pathetic look of a lost white lamb about her that had already touched and wounded all our hearts, looked round the group of us, and said,

"There is something wrong here" (she touched her dark masses of hair, seal-brown with red lights on it when the sun shone), "but I think you are all good to me. This man," she looked at me, "has it in his face—what was it you said?—God—he has God in his face. I have seen him somewhere."

By this I knew that she had been to the Tate Gallery in London, for the St. John that poor Will Lutterworth painted from my unworthy features is one of the chief ornaments of the second room, and is a picture that visiting schoolgirls are usually taken to see. A clue—and yet no clue, I thought. In any case, I could not give it away to these other men. Who would, under the circumstances?

You may think I was gratified by her artless words. No. Sorrow, and the keenness of the cripple's ever-watching eye, had taught me many things about women that most men—most women, for the matter of that—do not understand. I know only too well that women do not love the men they compare to gods.

But Flower, less wise in such matters, as the happy man is always less wise than the unhappy, looked

somewhat darkly at me, and turned Mary's words off with an unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, we're none of us angels," he said. "But we'll take good care of you till you get all right. We are intending just now to take you for a trip in Carl's schooner, if you feel you would like to come. We are going to look for Ku-Ku's Island."

The name did not seem to distress her to-day.

"I shall be glad to come," she said politely.

I cursed, in my heart, the ingrained society training that made her answer everything with the same sweet courtesy. Who was to know whether she wanted to go or not? This girl had been trained from babyhood to make herself pleasant at any and every cost; to join smilingly in parties got up for her pleasure, whether she liked them or not; to keep her feelings under control—always under control; that was the first Commandment in the Decalogue of her class—and look well, and look happy, even if she were miserable or ill. It was utterly impossible for us to know whether she was delighted or dismayed at the prospect of the journey we were proposing. She could see that everyone wanted it, and that was enough for her. . . .

But, undoubtedly, it was the best we could do for her interests. We stood a better chance of finding out something about her in that way than in any other. The time was the north-west season; seas would be calm—perhaps calmer than we wanted—we could provision the ship very decently, and the whole run ought to be quick, easy, and free from all discomfort. A perfect picnic, in short.

That was what we all thought and said. If we could have known! . . .

We got away next day.

By sunrise, everyone was at work upon the provisioning of the boat. It had been agreed that Flower, Jim Todd, Sapphira and myself were to put up equal shares of the expenses, with a general idea of "something decent" for Carl, if the expedition made a success. A good deal of Sapphira's share was reckoned in terms of provisions, and as she put them in at full retail price, she enjoyed a certain advantage over the rest of us that no one was unchivalrous enough to point out.

We took almost all the contents of the little store. Carl of course was pretty well stocked as it was, but we others were all agreed that things must be made as comfortable as possible for our Princess from the Sea. Sapphira had luxuries—these things pay, within hail of a gold-field—and we drew heavily upon them. Piles of tins labelled asparagus, *pâté de foie gras*, caviare, ox-tongues, fruit-puddings, cakes, mincepies, turtle-soup, shrimps, crabs, oysters, lobsters, grapes, peaches, honey, entrées of many kinds, fruit salads, French creams, and I do not know what, were accumulated on the counter, packed in bags and boxes, and carried down to the ship. Sapphira, as a present from herself, threw in "for Lady Mary" (she had given our guest a brevet title, and insisted on using it), six bottles of a brand of port rather popular in Papua, which is, I should suppose, eminently fitted for taking paint off doors, if anyone wanted to do a job of the kind without much regard for the door. I did not quite see the Sea-Lady drinking it—but Jim and Carl, I had small doubt, would see that nothing was wasted.

It was a royal day. Most days in Papua were, unless one strikes a spell of storm, but this day seemed

something above the ordinary. There was a dead golden stillness, so perfect as to be sad. In the forest that rose high behind Sapphira's deep-cut clearing, bush turkeys were whistling after the melancholy-merry way they have, and the little Pan-bird (I don't know its proper name) fluted "piercing sweet by the river." As the day wore on to high noon, the tops of the trees beyond the clearing seemed to be drenched in gold; gold dripped from their summits down on trunk and limb, and splashed upon the ground, where any space of earth showed among the smoke-blue shadows. It was a day when ill weather seemed a fable, misfortune incredible, death a dream. . . . One felt that one must live a thousand years.

We were all a bit "fey," I think. Anyone would have been, on such a day. There was present among us that feeling that is never quite absent from the Papuan dweller "out back," no matter how hard he works, of a kind of everlasting holidayness. You felt, as you do feel in these places, that there was nobody to tell you to do anything. . . .

And it was really, in schoolboy terms, a gigantic "lark" —this journey of ours in quest of a treasure island.

I suppose it was about one o'clock when we got off. We were all very light-hearted, going down to the boat; Jim was fooling in his own agreeable way; Sapphira (who seemed to have forgiven and forgotten) was grimly radiant; Flower appeared to be looking after everything and everybody, and enjoying himself at the same time. I remember that he was carrying Sapphira's pet laying hen for her, lest the boys should let it go; and that Jim, who had come down from the field ill-provided, was wearing one of his shirts; and that he

walked, unobtrusively but determinedly, in the front of the little procession, and kept back its pace by turning to talk to people—so that I never had to hurry to keep up. As for "Lady Mary," he carried a big sun-umbrella over her head (the heat along that coral walk in full midday was appalling) and, when we came to the whale-boat, which had an unusually high bow, I saw him help her in, not by lifting her bodily, but by deftly making steps of his two huge hands, so that she walked as if on a flight of stairs. Light as our Sea-Lady was, the feat demanded strength. I saw Rocky Jim look at the two, and draw in his breath. Admiration? of the muscular feat, or of the delicate figure upborne by it? I didn't know, but I wondered, as the boys shoved off the whale-boat, and started her away with long oar-strokes, if we were *all* going to fall in love with the Sea-Lady.

Carl was—and is—a seaman who never wastes time, deliberate though he seems. The boys were hard at work heaving anchor as we rowed out. We could hear the heartsome clamour of the chain—the sound that sets the wanderer's heart a-singing. . . . O woman, be very sure of your gipsy lover's love, before you tell yourself your voice is dearer to him than that call! . . .

I said to Jim that there was no sound like it in the world, and that going away in a liner that simply glided off from a wharf like a train, destroyed one of the chiefest charms of travel. What did he think?

Jim, of the burned-teak face, and the poet-gipsy heart, merely looked at me round the corner of his profile, cautious and one-eyed.

"Got a match?" he parried. But I knew what he thought.

The pleasant red moon-face of Carl hung over the bulwarks as we came alongside. I liked the look of the *Tagula*. She was one of those old-fashioned, South-seaman-looking boats, with a white painted wooden rail round her like the balusters on a staircase, and tall masts with stately topmasts to them, not cut short as masts so often are nowadays. Her decks were reasonably white, and her deckhouse just the right height to sit on. She was beautifully designed; her long, yacht-like lines as she lay on the green water of the lagoon, swaying slightly to the pull of the tide, made me think of many things and places in no way connected with the wild east end country of New Guinea.

For some reason or other, the face of our Sea-Lady lit up when she stepped from the Jacob's ladder on to the deck of the *Tagula*. I saw her pause, and run her eye aloft with the look of an expert. She seemed to like what she saw, but there was a shade of doubt in her expression.

"You like my ship, my lady, eh?" asked Carl, beaming. The *Tagula* was very dear to him.

"What's the use of asking her? She don't know a schooner from a soup-plate; how could she?" commented Sapphira, aside.

The Sea-Lady answered Carl, and I think her answer struck us all dumb.

"I do like her," she said, "but she looks to me as if she might not sail quite close enough to the wind, in a light breeze." She threw another glance aloft, looked at the boys who were making sail (there was something critical in her eye; Papuan sailors are, at the best, no yachtsmen in point of style), and then stepped down into the cabin as if it were her home.

Carl swore one of his curious salt-flavoured oaths.

"She hass a headt on her," he declared. "She iss no fool, that young laty. Not much madtness there. That is the one fault of my *Tagula*, that you must tack ant tack with her, if there iss no more than a half-capful of windt. But you would never think it."

"No, I shouldn't," allowed Flower, looking aloft. "Lady Mary seems to know a thing or two about ships."

"She iss a dotter of the sea," declared Carl sentimentally. "She is worthy to be a Norsewoman. . . . Up with her, boyce! You black cowce, haul."

Sapphira went below to dispose of her many bundles; Flower, taking things easy as he always did when there was no need for action, found a long chair, and stretched his great bulk in it, his face turned up to the sky, beneath the shelter of the rising mainsail. Jim, far aft, was already lighting up his eternal pipe. The *Tagula* caught the wind from beyond the reef, and leaned slightly over; the sea began to talk along her counter. Carl, at the wheel, his blue sailor's eyes fixed ahead, stood steering. The voyage had begun.

CHAPTER IV

HIS MAJESTY'S SHIP

THE Sea-Lady seemed tired with the bustle of departure and inclined to sleep, after we got away. She showed no symptoms of sea-sickness, even when we met the long roll of the Pacific outside the shelter of Croker Island, and Sapphira, green as the foaming combers, staggered mutely to her berth. Opposite the suffering mistress of the store, "Lady Mary" lay placidly all afternoon, and slept, as Sapphira told us, "like a cat after a saucer of cream."

Towards sunset she came out on deck. The *Tagula* was running easily before a wind that was almost fair. There was a pleasant, rain-like patter of reef points on the sails, and a talking of ripples all along the keel. Already the high mainland, with Croker Island merged in its fringes, was growing blue and mysterious, and the foothills over which I had toiled in search of coleoptera were taking on the aspect of some fairy country inhabited by people of a dream.

"Lady Mary," swinging to the heavy roll of the ship as easily as Carl himself, stood on the poop and scanned the horizon—I thought, not idly; she seemed to have a sailor's eye. She was wearing one of Sapphira's white dresses, drawn in to suit her slender shape; shoes had

been found for her, curious small things of scarlet morocco, which I took to be a relic of Sapphira's long dead little daughter, and to represent a sacrifice on our old friend's part that was little short of heroic. Flower watched her keenly from underneath his tilted hat as he lay in the long chair from which he had not stirred since we got away. I saw that, like myself, he had noted a change in the Sea-Lady.

Presently she came towards us. . . . Is there any setting in the world like a ship at sea to show off the grace of a beautiful girl? When does a woman look so like a flower as when she is swaying to the dance of the foamy keel, her hair wind-blown, her soft clothing ruffled like petals?

"She is like a white daffodil," I murmured, half to myself, as the Sea-Lady came down the deck.

"She is," said Flower. The note of antagonism had left his voice of late. I felt, rather than guessed, the reason why, when I saw his glance flit to her balancing left hand, and the strange rose-fiery gleam of the ring it bore. And suddenly in my heart there arose the chuckling contempt of the sharp-witted little man for the slow-moving mind of the giant. Clever Flower might be—undoubtedly was—but he saw no further through a stone wall than most men could; whereas I —I did!

"Whatever that pink diamond means, it does not mean love," I said to myself. "Flower thinks of the ring, and the name she used; I think of what can't mislead one—her eyes."

And I remembered the scrap of wisdom I had once picked up from a little-known translation of an Arabian philosopher—

" Friend, if thou wouldst know the secrets of hearts, even those which are hid from the owners thereof, heed not what a man shall say nor overmuch what he doth, for a tongue may be bridled as a desert steed, and the wild chariot of a man's actions may be driven upon the road of prudence.

" But what a man says not, looks not, doeth not—there shall the secret be found. The steed that was never born cannot be held in with the rein: nor can the chariot unmade be driven where a man would go."

In a thousand ways have I, the man who looks on at life, proved the truth of the old Arabian's philosophy. But never, I think, more clearly than in the case of our Sea-Princess.

. . . Well, of this afterwards. Lady Mary came to us, swaying along the deck, and dropped to a seat on one of the hatches. Flower and I sprang from our chairs to offer her a better seat—or at least Flower sprang, and I rose up.

" No," she said, settling her island Panama—another of Sapphira's benefactions—more firmly on her head. " Let me sit here. It makes me feel happy again. It makes me remember things. I have been in a ship like this. At least, it was like this, only—— "

" Cleaner," supplied Flower.

" Oh, he makes it *very* clean," she said anxiously. " But the other ship—there was so much whiteness and shine about her, and the sailors had very good clothes. Of course, these sailors—— "

She looked about the decks with the same anxious expression, clearly desirous of finding something pleasant and polite to say about the clothing of Carl's crew. Now when we had got away from land, every boy had tucked his calico " ramie " tightly about his loins, and converte-

it into a mere waistcloth. Some of the boys, indeed, had discarded all clothing but the native pandanus leaf, for greater freedom at their work. Enormously wigged, decked out in beads, dogs' teeth, red flowers from Croker Island, and chaplets of strung frangipanni blossom, they were decent, and they were certainly not neglectful of appearance. But as to clothing! . . .

Flower and I, seeing the humour of the moment, could not refrain from laughter, and the Sea-Lady, after a moment or two, joined in.

"I'm afraid I can't say much for them," she said merrily. "But the whole ship does remind me . . . I don't know what of."

"Don't try to remember; it'll come," advised Flower kindly. We both noticed, I am certain, the change that had taken place in her appearance. She looked brighter, happier, more like her natural girlish self. And God! but she was pretty, with her wavy brown hair, gold-lit, blowing in her eyes, and the sweet elfish laugh of her, over her shoulder, as she turned to walk the deck again. We had not seen her laugh before. I thought her, laughing so, like nothing in the world so much as one of Romney's darling Lady Hamiltons, whom I have always loved, every one of them.

"What's she up to now?" bumbled Flower, under his wide hat, following her with an interested eye.

"She's going to talk to Carl," I said.

"Then she knows less about ships than she seems to. Talking to the man at the wheel——"

He broke off with an ejaculation of wonder. The Sea-Lady had had no intention of breaking one of the ocean's most stringent laws. She had merely paused beside Carl, exchanged a word or two with him—the

Swede answering her enquiry briefly, with a look of pleased surprise—and had then taken his place on the grating, and put her hands on the spokes of the wheel.

Carl, his broad red face glowing with smiles, stood behind her for a minute or two, keeping his own hands on the spokes, and aiding her. It was not all courtesy, I thought—else I did not know the prudent Carl. He was not going to trust the masts of his *Tagula* to the whim of any lady passenger, be she as beautiful as the day, until he had made sure it was safe to do so.

But she seemed to satisfy him. In a minute or two he withdrew his hands, stepped aside, and stood contemplating the helmswoman with a grin of sheer delight. Lady Mary remained unconscious of his stare, her small feet set far apart, her hands on the wheel, her eyes not glued helplessly to the "lubber's point," but glancing now to the compass, now aloft or ahead. It was clear that not to-day for the first, or for the fifty-first time, had she laid her hands on a wheel. The Papuan crew, standing ready to go about, grinned till their ugly betel-stained teeth made gaps from ear to ear.

"That-fellow Mary him savvy too much," giggled the bo'sun.

"Ready about!" sang Carl. The boys rushed to the sheets, the booms swung round. Carl, still taking no chances, had reached the wheel in a bound, and stood behind the Sea-Lady, his hands outstretched ready to seize the wheel in an instant if necessary. But Lady Mary knew her job. She put down the wheel like a veteran seaman, bending her slight waist to one side and working hard on the spokes. I saw her little red shoes press tight on the grating; the evening wind was getting up, and the *Tagula*, I could see, despite Carl's

high opinion of her, was none too quick in answering her helm.

"That's it—meet her, meet her!" cried Carl, above the clatter of the booms. "By Gawt, you are worth an A.B.'s wages, my ladty! You are deserving to steer my *Tagula*."

Lady Mary laughed; her hair was a-sparkle with spindrift; the wind had blown her cheeks bright red, and even tinged her dear little nose with pink, and her eyes were dancing like the waves. You could see how she loved to hold the slender spokes and feel the whole might of those great towers of sail run through her two small hands.

"We haven't called her the Sea-Lady for nothing," observed Flower.

"She has evidently been quite at home on a yacht," I said.

"Yes?" he asked, turning his lighthouse head towards me—the simile is absurd, but he always did remind me of a lighthouse tower with the big lamps lit and glowing. "You've seen a good deal of society in England?"

"I'm none the better for that," I said.

"No, but you can help us New Zealanders and Australians in judging just where she belongs to. The yachting set is very wealthy and important, isn't it?"

He asked these things quite simply. The man, I take it, knew that no society in the world would have refused him entrance and did not care that it was so.

"It is," was my answer. "There is nothing more expensive than keeping a yacht—except keeping a daily paper."

"And yet," said Flower, "she was travelling on some

boat with those Greek or Spanish villains. Well, I give it up for the present. I suppose it'll all come out in the wash eventually. But if—— "

"Sail-ho!" yelled the bo'sun, war-dancing on the poop—where, by the way, he had no business to be; but Carl was no disciplinarian, apart from the actual running of his ship.

All over New Guinea, down its long, long coasts, and through its far-out many islands, that cry wakes every heart. Between the boats, in our little wood-built towns, among the palm arcades and fluttering rubber groves of our plantations, in our lonely trading stores, we wander only half awake—we dream. It's a beautiful dream, this of blue and golden New Guinea, and the days here are so long, in the absence of all the many important-unimportant trifles of the outer world, that there is ample time both for dreaming and for working. But when the steamer call rips the silence of our wonderful star-crystalled nights—when the dawn rouses to find great masts and funnels standing strangely among the long-necked stems of the palms beside the beach—then we wake, and then you shall see

> "All the long-pent stream of life
> Rush downward like a cataract."

The steamer siren—the glimpse of a far-off funnel—the frantic "Sail-o!" of natives sighting a red and black hull—these are the Prince's kiss in our palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

Everyone and everything on board the *Tagula* was waked up by the bo'sun's call. All the crew joined at once in his cry, and "Sail-o!" resounded in a deafening shout from rudder-chains to bowsprit. Sapphira lifted a wan face out of the companionway. Rocky Jim made

a jump into the shrouds, and hung on, one hand on his hat, staring southward. Carl had his binoculars to his eyes immediately; he swung unsupported on the deck like a sturdy palm in a breeze, watching the distant hull. Only Lady Mary betrayed small interest. She just glanced at the space of tumbling sea where a streak of black vapour showed against the sky, and distant masts and funnels pricked up like pins. Then she turned to her compass again, with a seamanlike glance at the great sail above her head. It was beginning to "slat." She put up the helm, and "met her" again neatly.

"What'll that be?" I asked our Captain.

"A man-of-war—must be—there isn't anything due," he answered. "I think I see her gunce." He replaced the glasses in their case, and made for the signal locker.

"Going to speak them?"

"Yess. I cannot tell who shall be looking for my lady. I think"—he was rapidly running up a collection of flags as he talked—"she iss a great person in her contry. I remember"—the flags were up and fluttering now, telling their tale against the high blue of the sky—"when I was a yongster, I haff seen some queence and kingce, and there is something about her make me think of them. It is the best thing we do, to ask these officers if they know something about her."

He was right—undoubtedly he was right. I felt it through and through, and was depressed to the soles of my boots in consequence. For now I saw what I had not fully understood before—that we should never have brought Lady Mary on this journey at all. She was not really interested in the treasure hunt; and I could see—in the sudden light cast upon our plans by the action

of Captain Carl—that the chance of benefiting her lost memory by confronting the survivors with her was at best a very small one. How did we know for certain that there were any survivors? We only thought—or feared—there might be. And we could, and undoubtedly should, have given up some of our chance of securing Ku-Ku's island, to run the *Tagula* as far south as Samarai, the chief settlement of East New Guinea. There Lady Mary could have been comfortably put up in a reasonably good house, with the Resident Magistrate, and have waited for the arrival of a steamer in a month or two.

Yes, that was what we ought to have done. Jim and Flower and I had no need to consult with one another, while the flags went up the mast, to understand what each was thinking. We had been selfish—not because of treasure, or at least not wholly, but because of other things. One other thing, perhaps one might say. Or perhaps one other person. Yes, that was down to bedrock at last. We had not wanted to lose the Sea-Lady.

Well, our sins—if they were sins—had found us out. There was one of His Majesty King Edward's ships of war, squat and grey, and streaming smoke from her funnels as no other vessel that ploughs the Coral Sea ever does or did—for we have no true Ocean Greyhounds on the Pacific side—and we were hailing her. And undoubtedly we would see and speak to her officers. And ten to one they would know all about our Sea-Lady, and would take her on board, and with their great speed run her down to Samarai in the course of a day. And maybe they would use their wireless to get a steamer to call. Oh, I could imagine lots of things—once we got in touch with His Majesty's ship.

I could have laughed to see the look on Flower's face. I swear he had turned quite pale. And Rocky Jim had put on the special cast-iron expressionless expression that he kept for moments of emotional stress. I don't know what I was looking like; very much "down in the mouth," I should suppose.

But Carl, watching for the warship's answer through his binoculars, seemed merely concerned with his duty as a seaman.

The warship was making in our direction, and so fast did she go that her funnels, and her turrets, and her fighting-tops, all crept into view within a very few minutes. It seemed no time at all till she was tearing close up to us, two great cascades of foam pouring from her formidable bow, a huge white wake marking her progress through the sea, and the turn she had made when nearing us. Carl had hove the schooner to (he did not trust the Sea-Lady with that job, though I think she was fully competent, but took the wheel himself, while he shouted orders to the scrambling, squawking boys), and the man-of-war, running smoothly with her engines stopped, to within a few hundred yards of us, came to a pause, lowered a boat, and sent her alongside.

A lieutenant, smart as—well, as a naval lieutenant; there is no simile—sprang up our Jacob's ladder, and stood on the *Tagula's* deck, looking sharply about him. He picked out Carl in the wink of an eye.

"You're the master, aren't you?" he asked.

"I am," was Carl's answer. "I haff signalled to you that there iss an English shipwrecked lady on board."

"Quite so. Is that the lady?"

Lady Mary had not abandoned the wheel; as soon as Carl stepped away from it, she had come back again,

and was standing on the grating, her hands resting lightly on the spokes, and shaking backwards and forwards as the schooner swung idly in the trough of the seas. I saw the young lieutenant look at her, and a change came into his face; it lost for a moment the hard-cut man-of-war expression, and became suddenly human and very young.

"Ah!" was all he said, but it was enough to make me dislike him on the spot. What right had he to be "ah-ing" over our Sea-Lady? He had not picked her out of the Pacific.

I wondered that Percival Flower did not take up the conversation, since he was always inclined to look for the lead. But I remembered, in time, that a captain is king on his own ship, and that it was Carl's place to manage things.

He was quite equal to the occasion.

"If you will step a little forwardt, pleass," he said, "I will tell you everything."

They went out of Lady Mary's hearing, but not out of ours, and Carl, briefly and clearly, despite his odd accent, told the young officer just how the case stood, not forgetting Lady Mary's loss of memory.

"So that iss how it iss," he concluded. "She does not know who she iss nor where she wass wrecked. But we think that you may haff been somewhere that you may hear."

There was a puzzled expression on the young man's face, as he stood swaying upon the unsteady deck, the gold buttons and stripes on his white uniform glinting sharply in the sun.

"Yes, we're only five days out from Brisbane, and we should know all about any wreck," he said. "But

there's been none recently in this part of the Pacific that one has heard of. Certainly no big liner. There was none due. We have had notice of a pretty big liner wreck about three weeks ago—a terrible job; *Princess of Siberia* lost three days out from San Francisco; collided with a derelict, and every soul lost but two men. But I don't see how that could have anything to do with the lady you have on board. It was thousands of miles away from here. Lots of important people on her; they were going south for the Sydney International Exhibition. Terrible thing. By the way, do you know whether we can get any fresh meat along this coast? Not likely to strike another chance for God-knows-when."

"There is no meat, unless you could buy a few pigce from the natives, and they haff not many," said Carl.

"H'm—Captain Cook pigs; I know the kind; all leg and snout, and take half a day to run down with dogs. . . . Not worth calling for. But about this lady —will you present me? My name's Franklin."

Carl took him up to the wheel, and went through the awkward one-sided ceremony. "This is Lieutenant Franklin, my lady," he said.

The Sea-Lady bowed.

"I am glad to see you on board our ship," was what she said. I think she was dreaming, awake, of the yacht on which she had learned that fancy seamanship of hers, in another world and time.

I could hear him "oh-ing" again, in his own mind. She was looking more than ever like a white daffodil blown out to sea; he would not have been human, or a sailor—and sailors are doubly human—if he had not admired her.

"Well," he said easily, "how would you like to come over and have a look at mine?"

"I should be delighted," was her reply. But you could not tell whether she was delighted or not.

"Then we'll go," he said. "I'm sure the captain will be glad to meet you and your friends. You'll come, of course, Mr.——"

Carl introduced Flower and myself and Jim.

"I daresay," said the lieutenant, "we'll be able to run her down to Samarai for you. This trading trip" (we had not seen fit to mention the real object of the voyage) "is hardly the thing for a lady passenger. Of course, we aren't allowed to keep ladies on board over a day, even in these out-of-the-way places, unless under very special circumstances, but I'm sure the captain will run you down to-morrow if you like."

Of course; I had known it; I had foreseen it. And there was the end of—of—of what?

"Oh, of everything," I said to myself angrily, without trying to define further just what it was that I was going to lose. Flower took a step towards the bulwarks. The Sea-Lady let go the useless wheel, I thought with some regret, and came forward, a pleasant smile on her face. But then she would have smiled like that if you had been leading her to the stake.

"Will you come with us, or would you rather not leave your ship?" asked the officer of Carl.

No direct reply came. The moon-faced captain was gazing at the warship, as she lay rolling gently on the swell some half-mile away.

"I think," he said, "those are signalce they are sending to you."

The lieutenant, with something very like a suppressed

oath of dismay, turned sharply round; he had been too much taken up with our Sea-Lady to see what he ought to have seen. The signal for immediate recall was flying from the great grey vessel's foremast.

"By Jove!" he said, hastily hand-signalling in reply. The flags fluttered down, and another string took their place.

"Gad!" he exclaimed. "Awfully sorry, shan't be able to take you on board after all. The owner's callin' me to hurry up. Wireless talkin' some rot or other to us. I say, I mayn't see you again"—to the Sea-Lady—"but you simply must write to me, and let me help to find your friends for you. I'd do anything to help you. I—— Good-bye. Good-bye." He was over the side, and into the boat.

"Give way, men," he cried, and the sailors, who had been staring hard at us all the time, bent to their oars with a man-of-war swing, and sent the whaleboat flying.

"Well!" I said, as the boat grew smaller, nearing the warship. "That's a curious sort of start."

Carl, busy lighting a pipe, said nothing for a while. Then, as soon as the bowl was fairly glowing, and he had taken a puff,

"She will steer to the north-east," he said.

"Why? What makes you think so? What did the signals say?"

"The signalce, off course they were code. But you will see. That way lice German New Guinea, and when one off our ships" (Carl was a naturalised Australian) "goce off in a hurry like that, it is something in German New Guinea that makes them go. I tell you, there is dynamite up there, and some day it will explode."

We were not much interested in Carl's predictions.

"Does that mean that the warship won't come back?" I asked.

"I shall be much surprisedt if she does. Now, boyce! Look alife! My lady, I will trust you to take the wheel again, if you like to haff it."

And in another ten minutes we were rolling and foaming away again, on our course to the Lusancays, and the warship, miles distant, was growing small and dim. She must have been doing two and twenty knots. She was hull down, she was gone, before we had made another couple of beats to windward. We might have fancied the whole occurrence was a dream.

But now we knew that the mystery encompassing our Sea-Lady was a mystery indeed.

. . . . . .

Two days should have been the voyage to the Lusancays, with a fair wind. The wind was very far from fair, and we took eight days to sight the first of the outlying islets. I think we all grew rather weary of the eternal beat, beat to windward, of the *Tagula's* roll and stagger in the trough of combing seas, of spray rattling like heavy shot upon her decks, and sails eternally slatting and thundering overhead. But the rapid improvement shown by the Sea-Lady would have compensated me—Flower also, I fancy—for ten times the inconveniences we suffered. She seemed to glow and expand like a blossom placed in water, from the very first day of the voyage. She was clearly an out-of-doors sporting girl of the modern English kind. Apart from her clever handling of the *Tagula*, she was a good shot with the guns we carried in the saloon arms rack—rifle or shot-gun alike—and beat all of us but Rocky Jim at the breaking-

bottle game. I could fancy her, in the perfectly-cut tweed shooting-dress of country-house wear, tramping in the moors with her gun on her shoulder, or clad in mackintosh and "waders," skilfully throwing the fly over the shallows of some quiet stream.

And yet there was something about her different from the ordinary girl of good society. I could not put a name to it; it was floating, elusive. It seemed to be connected with a certain quiet way she had of standing, with her hands lightly crossed in front of her, for half an hour or more at a time, without moving, except for the swing of her figure with the swinging of the ship. It made me think of things—and I could not tell what the deuce the things were.

Then, her smile—who on earth was that smile like? What did the wide, open glance of those large eyes of hers remind me of? I didn't know, but I felt at times as if I too had had a knock on the head, and forgotten something that I ought to remember.

Flower and Rocky Jim were of no help to me. I told them, as well as I could, about the odd, formless reminiscences she suggested; but they hardly seemed to understand what I was driving at.

Nevertheless, we had many talks about the Sea-Lady, when she had gone below to her cabin for the afternoon sleep that she generally took. We got maps of the Pacific, and worked out the distance from the spot where the *Princess of Siberia* had been wrecked, to the place where Lady Mary had come ashore. We asked each other if there was the slightest chance that she could have been connected in any way with that terrible disaster. And the verdict was that she could not. Even supposing, for the sake of argument, that some

passenger liner had picked her up, and carried her to our part of the Pacific, the liner would have had to keep a pace that no boat save a New York-Liverpool flyer could attempt.

No. Behind the moment when the Sea-Lady had walked into all our lives, glittering in her satin and jewelled ball-dress, out of the breakers of the Coral Sea, there was a sheer blank wall.

"All the same," said Flower on one of those afternoons, balancing himself against the roll of the ship, as he lounged on the top of the deck-house, "she must have come from some ship, from some large ship, and recently from some large ship. That stands clear. If we don't understand it, it is simply because some of the figures in the sum aren't in our possession. It'll all dry straight some day."

"I don't see how we are ever to find out," I said.

We were interrupted by Sapphira. For some days now she had been rapidly recovering, and on this afternoon she reappeared on deck somewhat unsteady as to her balance, but in full possession of all her faculties. We were very comfortable that afternoon, I remember. A coloured quartermaster was steering. Carl was lying in a long canvas chair securely lashed to the cleats of the hatch cover, Jim was on the hatch cover itself, with a pillow under his head, and an after-dinner glass of whisky-and-water wedged in the crook of his elbow. Flower and I were sitting back to back against the mizzen, smoking and reading. The sky was clearer than we had seen it for some days; great lakes of blue were floating amongst the clouds, and the eternal torment of the wind and sea was beginning to die down. It was a pleasant afternoon, and we felt at peace.

Into this came Sapphira, trig, clean, and stowed-away of aspect; her massive hair cabled tightly, her apron tied amidships and on top. There was a light in her eye that seemed to make Flower uneasy, for he put down his book and turned his pipe in his mouth, regarding her watchfully the while. I remembered afterwards that he was the only man of us who had been married.

"Are you aware," demanded Sapphira, in a carefully restrained voice, "of the state of the kitchen?"

"What's the matter with the galley?" asked Carl, to whom her question was directed. He sat up in his chair, as a concession to manners, then seemed to think better of it.

"Haff my chair," he said, getting up.

"If you can sit down," said Sapphira, "with that kitchen on your conscience—and smoke—and sleep—I don't envy you."

Carl looked as if he did not particularly envy himself at the moment.

"What's the matter?" he asked again.

"The matter," said Sapphira, "is that this ship, from the top of the staircase to the end of the bedrooms, and from the snout of her" (Jim let out an eldritch laugh) "to her tail, or whatever you choose to call it, is *dirty*."

"She is notthing of the kindt," said Carl indignantly. "Her decks are washed down every morning, and you won't see a speck on her brasswork. Ant the boyce sweep the cabince every day."

"You call that being clean?" said Sapphira, still with that ominous restraint in her voice.

"If that iss not clean, what iss?" asked Carl, preserving his courtesy with evident care.

"You're asking me to tell you, are you?" The tension of her voice had increased. I felt as you feel in the theatre when the Nihilist conspirator is standing with his hand on the key that is to let off the explosive mine, and the dialogue is leading up to the obvious clue.

"Certainly," said our captain. He had been touched on one of the chiefest points of a shipmaster's honour, and for the moment he really did not fear Sapphira a bit.

"*Then come!*" she exploded, taking him by the hand —he had dropped back into his seat—and fairly "yanking" him out of it again she whirled him along the deck —the Papuan crew stopping even their betel-nut chewing to stare at the strange sight—brought him up with a round turn at the galley door, and said, "Come inside."

Carl did not come. He stood outside the doorway—there was indeed scant room for two—while Sapphira swung herself into the interior of the galley, and in the open door confronted him.

"Does the cooky boy boil his dish-cloths every afternoon?" she asked, with a terrible calm. "Does he boil them every week? every month even? Does he *ever?*"

"I'm sure I don't——" Carl was beginning, but Sapphira swept on.

"How long is it since the stove has been cleaned out? How long is it since anything in the place saw a lick of blacklead? Where's the stove-brushes? What's in that rubbage-can behind the door? Do you dare to look? I knew you didn't. Is that the glass-cloths he's been scrubbing the floor with, or is it the tea-cloths, or is the dish-rags all one with them, and they with the floorcloths?"

"That's right, Sapphira," said Jim approvingly, over

the captain's shoulder. "Draft 'em all off into their own yards. Let's have a proper round-up, and I'll stand by to cut out any of them that doesn't belong. Are they cleanskins, or are they proper branded?"

"Clean!" snorted Sapphira. "There's nothing clean about this ship. And as to brands, you just reminded me, there's not a blooming one of them marked. How can you stand there"—to Carl—"and call yourself a captain, and sail these seas with not one of your kitchen cloths marked, giving-us-all-stomach-ache-and-domain-poisoning"(I inferred she meant ptomaine)- "and-flue-that-deep-under-the-bunks-and-water-six-months-in-the bottles-before- God-Almighty-and-these-gentlemen- Carl-you're-a-proper-*pig!*" (*Prestissimo al fine.*)

"Cut it, Carl, you're in the soup," remarked Jim. But Sapphira was not to be put off so easily. She dodged out of the galley, and got between Carl and the rigging.

"Come down below," she ordered; and Carl, apparently hypnotised, obeyed her, murmuring dismayedly to himself, "My Gawt! My Gawt!" Sapphira herded him down the companion. The skylights were open, and her subsequent progress was easily to be traced, by the continuous sermon that came flowing up on deck.

"Do you see the date of that newspaper under the cushion where it's been ever since you got it? Five months old. Shake them books in the bookcase" (clapping noise, and a sneeze). "Yes, I'm glad you're getting it. Argh! stamp on it, stamp on it before it stings. I suppose there's nests of them. . . . Hit it with the knife—the knife! . . . Now give me the key of them cupboards."

"I am very sorry, but it hass been——"

"Don't say lost. Don't do it, Carl. I seen it coming up to your lips. You give me them keys. . . ."

An ominous pause.

"Whisky's clean, even when it's spilled. I don't take no exception to whisky. And tobacco. That's a disinfectant, they say. Well, I never seen a place wanting disinfecting more. . . . You needn't tell me you didn't *know* them tomatoes was there. You didn't *care*. Got them in Thursday Island last month, I suppose. Or last year in Brisbane when you went for your annual overhaul. . . . Could any Christian woman cast away in this heathen land call them things socks, or should she say they was meant for rags to clean the door-handles with, that's never cleaned anyhow? . . . Burst aecordion, full of filthy cockroaches, and two teaspoons, that I'll lay you never knew was lost, inside of it. . . . What kind of pills?—Beecham's, well, they didn't do no harm to them cockroaches that's been eating of them, so I suppose they must have gone bad on you, and no wonder, because fresh butter—yes, it was! don't I see the paper the Company puts it in?—isn't meant to trickle down from top shelves over everything else when the sun's on that side of the ship, and destroy everything it touches, and you have a master mariner's certificate, and you let such things go on! Yes, I thought it was jam—or it has been, you can always tell by the musheroons that grows out on top of the tin. . . . There's only part of them there—two aces missing and most of the spades, and anyway there's too much playing away of wages in this country, by half. . . . Blacking isn't meant to be stored along with table-cloths, let me tell you, as you don't seem to know—not even when they aren't tablecloths, but sheets that's had

holes burned in them and sauce spilled over. Pot of honey with a hairbrush in it. The hairbrush'll wash, but it's a sinful waste of good food. If you don't know what that is, I'll tell you; it's some of your carbolic toothpowder, and there isn't anything on the face of the earth will run loose among everything you've got like carbolic toothpowder, if once you let it go. Newspapers and . . ."

I heard no more; not because there was no more to come, but because I was doing what Percival Flower had done already—fleeing hotfoot to my cabin. It was a four-berth one, none too big, and I shared it with Flower and Rocky Jim. Carl bunked in what he persisted in calling the "saloon." The big man and I were at one; we desired almost feverishly to get at that cabin, and sort it up as far as might be, before Sapphira in the course of her devastating career got round to us. I was sorry to note that the wind and sea were dying down every minute. Our only chance would have been a gale.

We found Rocky Jim in the little alleyway outside the cabin, leaning against the bulkhead with his hands in his pockets, and a twinkle in his eye.

"Here, you've just got time," warned Flower. "Come in and stow your things, they're hung all over the floor."

"Not I," said Jim calmly, surveying our frantic efforts—I am conscious, now, that we must have looked exceedingly like a very large and a very small terrier hunting unusually numerous rats in an unusually dense stack of hay. "I've too much regard for Sapphira."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you see how she's enjoying herself? Every crime she unearths makes her feel happier. The poor

woman hasn't many pleasures. Why should you take away one of the few she has?"

Flower muttered something about "fun to her, death to us," as he scrabbled under my berth for our mutual accumulated "wash." I was too busy throwing assorted rubbish out of the port to say anything. We made a kind of rough-and-ready clearance, and then went up on deck again. Sapphira, for the moment, was not visible. I judged by the sounds that she had got into the forecastle, where the natives slept, and was organising what housewives know as a "turn-out." Buckets of very dirty water began to trickle down Carl's immaculate decks. He looked unhappy.

"I wonder," he said, his blue eyes wide and mournful, "why the goodt Gawt should haff made women so."

"*I* wonder," said Jim, "if she'll scrub down Ku-Ku Island when we find it, and sweep all the untidy shells off the beach. It would only have to be done twice a day, when the tide came in and went out again, and then everything'd be tidy. I hope she will. I like to see people happy."

"Do you?" said Carl in a hostile tone. "What about me and the otherce? I tell you, I shall not landt on that islandt. Not for fifty treasures. It iss not so badt on my own ship, where I am master if I like, but on shore . . . No, I will standt off and on as long as you like, but on that islandt with that woman, I will not set my foot."

We roared with laughing. But I daresay we might not have laughed quite so much if we could have foreseen what this freak of Sapphira's was going to cost us.

It did not end that day. Next morning she got on to

the cabins, and had every article they contained, down to the floor carpets, carried out on deck. I don't know what she and the boys did afterwards, in the emptied rooms, except raise the devil generally, but I cannot think it was chance made Carl discover, on that especial morning, a weak spot in the main gaff that wanted his personal attention, and necessitated his spending all the time between breakfast and lunch aloft, swinging like a spider up in the high blue. By lunch—or rather early dinner—time, the gale seemed to have blown itself out. I do not refer to the weather, which had settled down to calms and light breezes, but to the squall of spring-cleaning that had broken on the ship.

Most of the crew had been taken off their work—it was well the weather was fine—to scrub, swill out, wash, boil, hang in the rigging, sort and stow away, everything movable and immovable of the ship's domestic property. Carl had escaped, as I say; the two brown quarter-masters had the course, and as the wind was fair, for once, there was no "'bout ship" to bring him down again. The Sea-Lady had gone to her cabin with a book. Flower, up on the poop, was pretending to notice nothing. Rocky Jim, who I think must have been possessed of the devil, was going about after Sapphira, cheering her on in her efforts.

"Here, Sapphira," I heard him say, "run your finger round the inside of the main hatch coaming, and lick it after—I did it, and I tasted dust as sure as you're born. Couldn't see dust, but it was there. Can't mistake the taste of dust. Sapphira, this is a dreadful ship, and we're a dirty lot of cows, all right. It's awfully good of you to take all this trouble. I can't tell you how good I think it of you."

The next thing I knew, he was after her about the ports.

"You haven't noticed it, Sapphira, but these ports have only been washed with soap and water, and the brass cleaned, ever since we left port. Not a grain of whitening on the glass, or a ball of old newspaper to shine them up. And they want it, Sapphira; the sea keeps coming over them and dirtying them with salt all day long. Shall I set two of the boys to whitening them up between the seas? . . . Did you have a good look at the corners of that gilt moulding that runs across the cabin ceiling? Let me get you a toothbrush. I've been to sea a lot, and I know they never use anything else for cleaning out those carvings but toothbrushes. Yes, do come into my cabin, I'd love to have you. It's on my mind night and day, the state I have my things in. I'm a careless pig, Sapphira, and that's the truth. I ought to be ashamed of myself. Yes, that's my swag. Let me capsize it. Isn't it a disgrace to any respectable man to have his things in such a mess? I never mend anything; I ought to be keelhauled. I'm such a bad example, too, I spoil all the others even if they're inclined to be tidy. Oh, Sapphira, look at that —what a beast I am to have all that bird's-eye spilled among my clean shirts—if you can call them clean, when nothing belonging to me is. And such a waste of good tobacco too, it's enough to bring down a curse from Heaven on me. The truth is, Sapphira, that I'm too lazy to look after anything but my own comfort, and what's worse, I don't *care*. It's nothing to me what state things are in. Oh, this is a dirty ship, and a disgrace to the Pacific Ocean, and I'm the dirtiest and untidiest thing in it. You won't be able to keep patience

with me; nobody could, and I don't deserve it. If you were my mother, Sapphira, wouldn't you——"

"Your what?" It came up from the cabin like a pistol-shot.

"My mother, my dear old dead mother. If you were her, wouldn't you give me a talking to? But——"

"Why, Lord bless your ignorance, Jim Todd, how old do you think I am?"

"I wouldn't think about it, Sapphira; it wouldn't be respectful, and I do respect you a lot. I wish you'd try and teach me to be clean and tidy. I don't know that anybody could, but it would do me good to be talked to a bit. Just as if you were my——"

I don't know what it was that went down or off with a smash just then. When I asked Jim, he only said it was Sapphira's temper giving way. Give way it certainly did. She went out of the cabin like a rocket; I do not know where she disappeared to—it might have been the hold—but we saw her no more till dinner-time.

And then, shortly after, it dawned upon myself and Flower that Rocky Jim, the undaunted, had done what no other man on the ship—nor any other in New Guinea—could have done. He had tamed Sapphira.

She was tamed. We had a day or two to run yet before sighting the elusive Lusancays, and during that time there were no more upheavals. Instead, she took command of the galley, and produced meals for us that almost reconciled Carl to all she had made him suffer.

"The worst I haff to say of New Guinea," he remarked confidentially, after a noble feed, "iss that there iss almost never anything you may call nice to eat. In my country——"

"Talking of that," broke in Jim, "last time I was in

Port Moresby the steamer was in, and one of the usual tourists was roaming about looking at things, and he said to a Government officer—you can guess who—'This is a wonderful tree you have in New Guinea, this beautiful pawpaw. I understand that besides being lovely, and agreeably scented, it is a sovereign remedy for dyspepsia and indigestion. Is it not, sir?' And the old boy looked at him, and said, 'I don't know.' 'You don't know, sir?' said the tourist. 'No,' says he. 'We never have indigestion in New Guinea—*no such luck.*'"

We all laughed. Sapphira opened her mouth, but before she could speak Jim burst in,

"But men are such pigs, anyhow. All they care about is what they put in their faces. That's what we're like. Give us a plateful of something to guzzle, and the world might be on fire all round us, for what we'd care. I've no patience with us. Have you, Sapphira?"

I saw her look at him oddly, but she was silent.

It was cool and pleasant on deck. We loafed, reading and talking. Sapphira had gone below. Something moved me to ask Carl—not Jim,

"How old do you think she is, really?"

And Carl said soberly, "I don't know. She hass been very handsome, once."

Jim looked as if he were about to speak, but thought better of it.

Into the midst of our talk came the Sea-Lady, walking lightly on the level deck.

"I think," she said, "the Lusancays are in sight."

It was true. We had been so much taken up with our dinner—I fear Jim's burlesque statements had some core

of truth in them—that nobody had noticed the low line of pale blue dots on the horizon, until the Sea-Lady drew our attention to it. Carl got up with a hurried exclamation.

"That iss Finster ahead," he said. "And Disappointment that iss just on the edge off the horizon. I will tell you now, I haff a very good idea which is that Ku-Ku Islandt."

"It won't tell us much, as we haven't seen the group," said Flower.

"Ant you won't see it either. Finster and Disappointment, and that atoll that iss Caradoc—it iss just wash—they are in a long line away out at the end of the Lusancays; we shall not go to them, but only Disappointment we shall sight, and then we shall make nor'-nor'-east for about ten milece, and then there iss an islandt that hass no name, and I think that might be Ku-Ku's. There iss two off them near together, ant they are no good, and everyone goes a long way out from them for they are dangerous. If that iss not Ku-Ku's islandt, one off them, then it iss nowhere."

"We shan't get there to-day?"

"We might, and we might not, but I shall not try. Rather I shall take sail off her. I do not want to make that islandt except in good daylight in the morning. I tell you, it iss a badt islandt. To-morrow morning it will be."

And to-morrow it was.

CHAPTER V

ON THE TERRIBLE ISLAND

WE made the unnamed island about ten o'clock next morning. The breeze had failed almost altogether, and we had a long beat of it, creeping up and up by degrees, over a sea barely ruffled by the lightest possible wind. I cannot hope to describe the wonder and beauty of the waters through which we passed. It was not new to me by this time, yet I could not help exclaiming, when the *Tagula* went slowly leaning and sliding past some mile-long stretch of shallows coloured vivid verdigris green, with deeps of blue—Reckitt's blue—running sharply into it, and tracts of curious pale lilac showing, and glancing, and eluding the eye again, as reef after reef opened out. This beauty, of course, had another side, and Carl expressed it vividly when he came down from conning the ship in the cross-trees, and shook his brown fist at the sea.

"Why do you do that?" asked Lady Mary. She was not steering now; the bo'sun, a smart and capable native sailor, was standing at the wheel, dressed in a red bead dog-collar and two yards of blue-and-yellow checked calico. He had been keeping a sharp ear for his captain's calls from aloft, and now that we were through the worst of the reefs, still had his eyes firmly fixed ahead, looking for more.

"Because that sea iss full of those badt colource," said Carl, his English rather worse than usual through stress of feeling.

"Oh, I never in all my life saw anything so lovely." She stood smiling at him with that heart-melting smile of hers; she would have made any man disavow his dearest convictions. . . .

"Well," allowed Carl reluctantly, "perhaps they are pretty, but I hate them. Every time I see those colource, I shake my handt at them, because they shall put my *Tagula* in danger. No, Lady Mary, give me the dee-eep blue water that is out of soundingce, not thees badt beautiful places. I hope no squahl come up when we are here, or I shall haff to run, and that Ku-Ku Islandt, it must wait for another day."

"Couldn't we land if the weather were bad?" I asked.

"If the islandt iss the one I think it. . . . Well, wait till you see, that iss all I say. Now, my lady, I shall ask you to excuce me, I must go aloft again."

Flower all this time had been looking through his glass, which was a magnificent one, at a dim blue mass some miles ahead of us. He now folded the glass, slipped it into his case, and remarked,

"As bad a looking approach, and as nasty a set of reefs, as you could wish to see. Sort of natural sea-fortress. If the island is all Carl says——"

It was. Long before we came up to it we saw it clearly, standing out high against the heavens, an isolated, table-topped cliff of a place, heavily bushed on top, and with long green streamers of tropic vines dripping down its sides.

"It looks," remarked Sapphira, as we worked slowly

in, Carl displaying magnificent seamanship, "like a big white cake as had been iced too thick with green icing, and the icing was dripping down its sides."

"It looks," I said, half under my breath, "like the end of the world." And indeed it did. In spite of the marvellous beauty of the place, there was a sense of finality, of fate—something like the strange aura of sadness that hovers round the beauty of a late gold summer afternoon, bringing reasonless tears to the eyes —about this island at the end of all the islands. The day was one of those too perfect days that throw a magic light on the meanest things; that gild a heap of abandoned crockery into jewels, and turn a dustbin to a thing of mystic beauty. What it was, about that lonely, palm-crowned coral island in the midst of those fairy seas, may be imagined, but never told.

The Sea-Lady felt it. You could see the sense of the wonder of the place run through her as the electric current runs through the wires. And I, who know so much more about women than I would wish to know—for in the great game of life, as in the smallest, the looker-on sees most—I knew that, in Lady Mary as in meaner women, and in higher too, if there are any higher than she, love would wake, under the heart-warming caused by all this beauty, as a flower wakes under the sun. Because the seas about this island were coloured like the gems in the heavenly city—because the *Tagula* floated on green lagoon water like a white butterfly hovering upon a meadow, and the day was one of a thousand days—the big surveyor would look noble in my lady's eyes; his voice would have tones unheard by her before; her thoughts would go to him, brightly, kindly, like innocent birds on the wing, flying they knew

deck. The big water-breakers in the boat were already full.

"Spare me days," said Jim, pipe hanging out of the corner of his mouth, "we ain't going to eat all that this afternoon."

"Nevertheless we shall put it in," maintained Carl. "If any accident should happen, that is a badt, badt islandt to be on."

"Anything to please," said Jim obligingly. The boys slung tins into the boat, and Carl, reading out from a list, tallied them with Jim to count.

"Cap., you're mighty particular," observed the miner.

"I haff been cast away," answered Carl.

"You never told us about it."

"Now I never will."

"Did you kai-kai one another?"

"How many tince of biscuit is that? You do not mindt your work." Carl was very much captain this morning.

The boat was loaded and slung into the water. Down the Jacob's ladder went Flower, to steady things; the Sea-Lady, Sapphira, Jim and I.

"Come on, Carl," said Jim.

"I am not coming," said the captain. "It iss no use I come, as I do not mean to stay. I will standt off and on ass long ass the weather lets me, but on that islandt I do not go."

"Why not? You don't really believe that yarn about pouri-pouri?"

"It iss not a nice yarn, and I do not like it, but . . . No, on the islandt I do not go."

"Can't Wai-Wai be trusted with the ship for an hour?"

"I would trust Wai-Wai with my *Tagula* from here to Samarai. It iss no matter. I am not going."

"*Now*, Sapphira!" remarked Jim reproachfully.

"What are you 'now-ing' about?" she demanded, beginning to get up steam.

Jim burst forth.

"What proper cows we are! Every one of us the same, and none of us better than another. You're right, Sapphira, you're always right." (She had not had a chance to say a word.) "As for me, I'm the worst of the lot, and you wouldn't give a bad halfpenny for me—no one would. When things go wrong I blame you, just as if they were your fault, and when they go right I never give you credit. I make you tired. No wonder. I'm all gab and no get-and-get-to work. Sapphira, you're just sick of me."

"I am," said Sapphira, striking frantically with her blunted weapon.

"Didn't I tell you?" demanded Jim triumphantly, as one who claims an honest victory. Then he swung into the stern seat and took the tiller.

"So long, Carl, if you won't come," he said. "We'll be back for dinner."

"You had better not stay too long in this weather," warned the Swede, leaning over the quaint banister rail of the ship.

"Why?" I remonstrated. "It's perfect—a hand-picked specially-selected pet day."

"That iss why," said Carl. "It iss too good."

"You're in the sulks, Carl," shouted Jim, as the boat pulled off. "Go and get a duster to play with, to keep you from fretting till we get back."

Carl ignored the remark.

"Row roundt the islandt till you come to somm safe place," he called. "You cannot landt there, but there iss sure to be somm little break, maybe where the waterce run down from the top."

"Thanks," called Flower. We pulled away.

"Anyhow," I said, "if this is or isn't Ku-Ku's island, the Greek chaps haven't found it out. There doesn't seem to be a soul about the place."

In truth there did not. As we rowed on round the precipitous cliffs, in the unnatural calm of that still gold day, the oars of the native boatmen waked lonely echoes against the rocks; white sea-birds dipped and screamed above our heads, and the sea, sucking in and out of unseen hollows, made a slapping noise. There were no other sounds. No column of smoke curled up from the heights above our heads; no figures moved, and as we worked on round the island walls, no boat, canoe, or raft showed up in any crack or gully. There were several of these, but we couldn't find one that seemed practicable till we had rowed so far round the island that the *Tagula*, which had moved further out to sea, came right into view again.

"This won't do," remarked Flower. "We have been three-quarters of the way round now, and we've simply got to find a way up. If there is none, we may manage something with these vines; they're as strong as Manila hemp."

"That's right," observed Jim. "The old road to the Yedda fields, in nineteen hundred, went right up a straight eight-hundred-feet cliff, and we had a ladder of bush rope all the way."

But we did not have to venture by the perilous Yedda plan after all. When we had rowed a very little further,

Jim, Flower, and I all raised a shout together. We had seen the gate of the island.

It was not easy to find it by any other means than those which we had adopted. You could have sailed past the island a dozen times, in a dozen directions, without knowing it was there. It was a mere crack in the wall of weathered coral, leading to a very narrow waterway, up which our boat could only progress oars in, pushed by the hands of the boys. At the end of this finger of the sea there was a minute sandy beach of the purest sugar-white, and a mass of fallen rock and detritus, overgrown with shrubs, and sloping gradually up to the top of the island.

Carl had arranged that the whaleboat was not to wait for us, but to come back to the ship, as he did not wish to be left aboard without the major portion of his crew. The natives unloaded the stuff we had brought—I remember how we all laughed at the pile of tins—all except Flower, who seemed a bit impervious to the joke. It did seem absurd to take such mountains of stuff ashore for a single afternoon.

We climbed the glacis of fallen rock, helping the women over the stones and through dense nets of tangled bush and vine. Jim and Flower, being accustomed to live in the bush, both had sheath-knives in their belts, and they had to cut the way pretty often before we finally reached the top, and came out from the choking, sweltering heat of the sun-warmed gully on to the windy height above.

We found ourselves upon a wide plateau, perhaps half a mile across, covered in places with tall beds of reed grass, and in others with the same dense masses of bushes and low trees that had impeded our ascent. In

the strong cool sea wind we stood for a few minutes, looking about us, and trying to see traces of what we sought.

"Would you call that the remains of a path or would you not?" demanded Jim of me.

I looked at the faint streak of thinness that ran through the heavy bush ahead.

"It might be," I said. "If there ever was one, it ought to run from just this point. What do you think?" I asked, turning to Flower.

Surveyors are constantly occupied picking up obscure marks and traces of "former" lines in the bush. If anyone could find the path, it would surely be Flower.

But Flower was not looking for it. I could not make out at the moment what he really was looking for, or at; whatever it may have been, it brought sudden colour into his face, and an excited expression. He hardly seemed to hear what I said till I repeated it.

"Track? Oh, undoubtedly," he answered at last. "There has been one leading right away from this." He did not seem a bit surprised.

"Then let's follow it," I suggested, for he was not looking at the place at all, but bending down—I thought—to retie his boot.

"Yes, we'll follow," he said in a minute, straightening up. He slipped something into his trouser-pocket—we were none of us wearing coats. "Pity we didn't keep at least one boy and a clearing-knife," he said; "this is going to be tough work."

Tough it was, but Jim and he managed it between them with their sheath-knives, and in half an hour or so we came out upon a space of grass, apparently about the middle of the island.

"Mind your eye," said Flower. "There are caves here." We could see that for ourselves—more than one dark opening showed in the waving grass. I was not surprised; those coral islands are often full of caves. But I saw that we must advance cautiously.

The Sea-Queen had hardly opened her lips since we started, but now she spoke.

"Mr. Flower," she said, "it's as well there are caves, for I think we're going to get wet."

At this, we all of us looked up.

"My oath," said Rocky Jim, "if Carl wasn't right after all; there's going to be the father of a squall."

The sky, while we were fighting our way through the overgrown track, had turned from blue to blackish purple, all but a little space. As we looked, the blackish colour began to invade that also. A cool, rainy-smelling breeze swept across the grasses, and shook their heads.

The Sea-Lady spoke up.

"This is going to be bad weather. Hadn't we better get back to the ship, in case she has to run for it?"

I noticed, even at that moment, that "Lady Mary" was speaking with a decision and—how shall I put it?—an ordinariness—that had been foreign to her before.

"She's coming back," I said to myself exultantly. "She's coming back." But there was no time to think about that. The squall was close upon us, and it looked like a bad one. The few slim coconuts that stood on the island top were beginning to lean over and show the whitish undersides of their leaves, and the sea-birds had taken up a curious, pitiful screaming.

We looked to the big surveyor.

"No time to get back," he instantly decided. "You can only crawl through that bush, and before we were

half-way down, Carl would have cleared out. It's all he can do. He'll come back. Let's get into these caves, kareharrega " (quickly).

There was a cave-opening not twenty yards away. We made for it. Even in the hurry of getting away from the squall, with the thunder bumping and bursting above our heads, and jags of lightning making blue flame in the trees, it struck me that the entrance was remarkably clean and unobstructed. We went down an earthy slope, with white coral limestone walls and reef, that began so low as to force us to bend half double, but gradually heightened with the slant of the ground, till they rose high above our heads. The slope ended in a circular chamber, with three or four dark passages running off. We could not explore them, as we had no lights with us save a stray box of matches or so, and, anyhow, we were very well sheltered where we were. The thunder came in furious claps now, and the lightning was with it, after it, before it—you could not be sure, but you could be very sure the storm was right overhead.

Jim and Flower lit pipes, after asking permission. Sapphira and the girl sat close together, holding each other's hands. I knew Sapphira hated the lightning, but she would not even wince when it came, seeming to strike again and again right over our heads. Lady Mary was quite calm.

" I never," said Jim by and by, " heard such queer sounds as there is in this place. I reckon it's the echoes of the cave. It's like rhinoceroses choking."

We hadn't noticed it, with the noise of the thunder, but now we listened in between the peals, and heard what Jim had spoken of. It was a curious snorting, bubbling sound, as if (I thought) several water-pipes

somewhere had gone wrong. But there couldn't be water-pipes on this solitary island.

Nobody could make anything of it. I suggested that it might be caused by rain-water falling through a cleft. The storm kept on relentlessly. To pass away the time, we fell to discussing the island.

"I think we'll get it all right," said Jim. "There's been a path and this cave isn't altogether as Nature left it. Daresay this was the place where they worked the shell-money. The rocks at the sides are all worn and polished where bare feet would have been treading on them."

They were; but there was no sign of broken shell, nor any fragments of the old hand-drills they must have used by the dozen. Flower pointed this out.

"All the same," he said, "I think it's the island."

"So do I," said Sapphira. "I think it is, because you can feel the devils creeping all about the back of your neck. The boys always said it was pouri-pouried. I wish we was well off of it."

I knew what she meant; there was an odd, fateful, melancholy feeling about the place. But caves are gloomy spots at the best.

It seemed as if the "pouri-pouri" element was getting on the nerves of the whole party, for nobody spoke during a minute or two. The thunder lessened and began to roll away. Outside the rain still reared and beat. Trickles of water ran down the slope of the cave, and lost themselves in the dark side openings.

"That's the devil of a noise," remarked Flower presently, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and turning his big head and lantern eyes towards the largest of the dark corridors that opened off our refuge. It seemed as

if the choking and gurgling were coming from that direction.

"It sounds," said Sapphira, "just the way the men does, when they've been and had two drops too much, and is sleeping it off."

Jim was not paying much attention: he had been staring out of the mouth of the cave.

"Rain or no rain, I'm going to see where the ship is," he remarked. "This has been a proper bad squall, and I'd like to have a look."

"Right," said Flower. "There's no use in everyone getting wet. We'll explore a bit of this cave while you're away."

"Keep a few gold mey-deres and a diamond crucifix or so for me," drawled Jim, as he went up to face the storm. It seemed to eat him up the moment he went out; he was whirled away into the furious rain and disappeared, head down against the blast.

"Well, now . . ." began Flower, taking a box of matches out of his pocket, and preparing to heave his big bulk up from the floor. . . .

The sentence was never finished. A heavy peal of thunder broke into it and drowned it. And on the heels of the thunder came something that struck us dumb as fish.

Out of the black archway walked a man, barefooted, dark of face, dressed in rough dungaree. He did not look at us at all, though we were full in view. He came forward uncertainly, tripping and stumbling a little over the inequalities of the ground, with his hands stretched widely out. Passing so close beside the Sea-Lady that his brown dirty feet almost touched her white skirts, he went in a blundering sort of way to a cleft in the wall of

the cave, took out a black bottle, drank from the neck of it, and slowly turned round again, his hand on the wall to guide himself. All this time the gurgling and snorting, somewhat diminished, went on in the inner cave, and I heard a groaning yawn.

Then it was that woman's tongue betrayed us, as woman's tongue has done so many million times in the history of this tired old world.

Sapphira caught at my coat-sleeve.

"My God," she whispered—low, but not low enough—"he's bl——"

On the instant the man swung round, snatched a revolver out of his belt, and fired. The bullet splattered flat against the rock an inch from Sapphira's head.

Flower, who was sitting on the other side of Lady Mary, seized her ruthlessly, and flung her down flat on the ground. I was too much bewildered to do the same for myself. The man, staggering unsteadily on his feet, his wild black eyes, fiercely opened, staring not at us but at the roof of the cave, swung round and round, firing at random. Five more shots went off in as many seconds, and I felt something like a sharp blow on my arm.

The surveyor was on his feet by this time, and rushing at the man, downed him in one furious blow. We were all unarmed; I cursed the folly that had induced us to land, on any part of the wild New Guinea coast, without firearms. But who would have thought them necessary, on a desert island far away at sea?

By this time, shouts from the interior of the cave told us that the man's companions were waking from what had evidently been a drunken sleep.

"Get out—quick!" said Flower. He seized the Sea-Lady and Sapphira by an arm apiece and seemed fairly to swing them out of the cave. I followed as quickly as I could; the pain of my arm was turning me sick, and a red stream was dripping on the ground. We got away from the mouth of the cave, and half across the open grass space that surrounded it, before we realised that the squall had blown itself out as suddenly as it had begun, and that the sky was clearing again. I had fallen behind; I don't know what it was that made me waste a precious moment or two by turning my head to look at the mouth of the cave. . . .

Four men had come out of it, and were standing at the entrance, their faces turned horribly up to the sky, their hands on the pistols that every one of them carried.

I gave a warning yell. Flower, quick in movement as any man of half his size, swung round, saw what I had seen, and dragged the women behind a pile of rocks. I don't know how I reached the place, but I got there just as a shot rang out. It missed. We all huddled together in the shelter of the pile. For the moment we were safe.

"Show me your arm," said Flower. He looked at it. The bullet had passed through, leaving a hole on each side. He twisted his handkerchief firmly round to stop the bleeding.

"Loosen it a bit in twenty minutes or so," he whispered. We looked cautiously round the corner of the rocks. The men were still standing where we had seen them. They seemed to be listening.

"Do you think," whispered Flower, "you could get along the track and warn Jim, without any noise, while

we stop here until we see what they're going to do?"

"Yes," I said. My head was clearing; the pain was not so bad. I got up and went slowly and carefully forward.

I was just in time. Jim was making his way up the beach. He did not seem at all surprised when I met him with a finger on my lip, a hand frantically waved, enjoining silence. It was hard to astonish Jim.

We were a good way from the cave by now, but I spoke in a whisper as I told him what had happened.

"I think they're all blind," I said, "but every one of them has got firearms, and they're mighty anxious to use them. We'll wait till we get them out of the way, and then make for the ship as quickly and quietly as we can, and pray God the women don't stop a stray shot. Where's the *Tagula?*"

"That's what I was going to tell you," said Rocky Jim coolly. "The *Tagula* isn't there."

"Isn't there?" I felt incapable of saying another word. My wound was beginning to tell, and this shock . . . What did it mean?

I sat suddenly down on a stone.

"I reckon," said Jim, standing, hands in pockets, beside me, "that squall—it was more than a squall, it was a 'gooba'" (a kind of miniature hurricane) "drove her on to the reef, and sunk her. It came from the wrong quarter, blast it. The only thing you can reckon about the weather in these islands is that you can't reckon upon it in any way. Carl was prepared for anything from the nor'-west, but this thing, this 'gooba'" (he described it in a few brief adjectives), "was right from the sou'-west and got him."

"Poor Carl," I said, half stunned.

"I think it's poor us," said Jim indifferently, "but have it your own way. Where's this game of blind-man's-buff being played? We may as well take a hand in it."

CHAPTER VI

MAROONED

WE crept as noiselessly as possible through the screen of bush. I saw that Jim was laughing, and I felt somewhat indignant.

"This is no joke," I whispered. "The brutes will pot us every one if they can. It's a mercy they can't see."

"Yes, but," said Jim, "it's all so damned funny." We were up on the top by now, and he could see the four ragged black-avised villains standing at the mouth of the cave, their guns pointed down the way where they knew the only practicable road to lie. "I can't help it," he apologised, stifling a giggle. "Us creeping about trying to dodge them, like the games one used to play when one was a kid—spare me days!"

Nevertheless, he had sized up the whole situation in a glance. Instead of uselessly returning all the way to the rock where the rest of the party were sheltering, he signalled to them to join him quietly. They did, Flower walking behind the women, and shielding them as far as possible from any chance shot. I don't know how the Greeks heard anything—or even if they did—but one of them, having lowered his gun for a minute, suddenly flung it to his shoulder again. The women and Flower were still a few yards from the break of the hill. Jim saw the action of the Greek, and leaped with

the activity of a tiger-cat to Flower's side. The bullet sped wide, but not so very far.

"Get a move on, girls," advised Jim, hustling the women unceremoniously. We were down the slope leading towards the beach before another shot barked out.

"Must have plenty of cartridges," commented Jim. We all drew breath more freely, now that we were out of shot, but Jim and the surveyor decided, almost without words, that the slope below the hill was no safe place for halting. "There's a bosker cave a little way along," said Jim. "I found it while I was looking around for the *Tagula*." He had already told them briefly of the disaster to Carl and his ship. We crashed through the clinking coral on the beach with the noise of bulls in china-shops—no help for it; the Greeks were probably too far away to hear, and in any case, it was impossible to stop there. The cave ran back from an insignificant narrow cleft quite near the place where we had landed. Jim squeezed himself in: we followed. It smelled of damp rocks and seaweed, with a whiff of decayed fish; it was dark, very cool after the fierce sun outside, and there was a drip of water down one corner, running green across the face of the white rock, and making for the beach and the sea.

We were only a few yards in when Flower called a halt.

"Todd, this'll do," he said. The cave had widened suddenly after the opening; it was now a fair-sized gallery with a clean sandy floor. "We can explore by and by. The thing is to get our stores in at once. Some of those beasts might not be as blind as they look."

"Right-o," agreed Jim. "Ireland can look after the women, and they can look after him; I reckon he wants it."

I did, but there had been no time to think about that. Sapphira took the wound in hand promptly and somewhat callously. She washed it, satisfied herself the bullet was out, and tied it up afresh.

"Spit on it first," she said. "When you've no drugs, it's healing." She knotted the handkerchief skilfully. The Sea-Lady, meantime, had been sitting beside us, waiting for any opportunity to help. She took my hand in hers, when the bandage was on again, and, before I could stop her, bent her lips to it.

"Thank you, brave man," she said; and suddenly the ache that had possessed me since Jim and Flower went out, leaving me "to take care of the women," died away. Whatever else they had done, or would do, it was I, and only I, who had shed my blood in defence of our Sea-Lady.

But this could not go on. We were all wild to talk the matter out. Flower and Jim, aided by Sapphira, who went out in the sun and "lumped" tins ably in the skirt of her dress, got our stores into the cave in a very few minutes. Jim took a run up to the top to see what the Greeks were doing and reported them as sitting on the rocks outside their cave, drinking out of the necks of bottles. Feeling secure for the moment, we all plumped down on the sand—I remember how cool it felt, and how cool was the unsunned rock on which we leant our backs—and began reviewing the situation.

The loss of the *Tagula* was the first consideration. We were not agreed as to whether she had been driven

right on to one of the many dangerous reefs that stood sheer up out of the deep water, and had slid off again, fatally stove in, or whether she had been taken aback, and in that way sunk without trace. Whatever had happened, we knew, must have happened while she was running for safety, some good way from the island, since none of her crew had swum to land. Papuans of the coastal districts are well-nigh amphibious, and no matter how the ship had been sunk, some of her boys were almost sure to have got away. There were a few useless rocky little isles a long way out, and, for all we knew, a boy or two might at that moment be sheltering on one of them. That concerned us little. The ship was gone; Carl was gone; and we were marooned on Ku-Ku's island in company with five men, four of them in good condition, one possibly injured, who were clearly bent on doing away with anyone who might dispute the possession of the place with them.

"What I don't understand," said Flower, "is, first of all, this blindness business—we must look out and see it doesn't hit any of us—and secondly, why the beggars didn't welcome us, no matter what they found or what they're afraid of being pinched for doing. You see, they're helpless; they don't know our ship has been lost, and we must be their only chance of getting off from the island, and seeing a doctor, if that's going to be any good to them."

"Yes, that's a puzzle," Jim agreed. "Maybe they——"

"I think I can tell you," broke in the Sea-Lady's silver voice. Did I say silver? No, that her voice was not; it was golden, rather: golden like the once famous "voix d'or" of once lovely Sara Bernhardt.

"They expect their cutter any day. You see, when they took me into it——"

"What?" I think we all said together. But I don't believe anyone but I realised, at that moment, the thing that had happened. Lady Mary was remembering.

"When they took me into their cutter, off the big fast ship with the guns that I told you about——"

"You didn't tell us," cried Jim, but Flower nudged him.

"Let her go on," he said. And she went on.

"We didn't come across the poor native in his canoe for a whole day. And when they found him, and saw how he was loaded with red shell and shell-money, they raised a shout. And they took him into the cutter, and did cruel things to him. . . . Oh, I don't want to talk."

She stopped, and put her hands before her eyes. Flower, with quiet determination, took them down again.

"Look at me," he said. "Now tell us. Go on telling."

There were tears in her eyes, but she obeyed, breathing quickly, as if she had been running.

"They stuck their knives into him, till he told them something—he could speak a little English. Then they repeated it over and over again and they said . . . What was it?"

"Caradoc, Finster, Disappointment," prompted Flower.

"Yes, that was it." And then she began to sob; it broke my heart to see her. "Must I go on?" she said.

"You must," said the surveyor; his eyes were kind, but in his voice was a ring of steel.

I could hear Jim breathing hard behind me. "I

would like to punch him one on the jaw," he whispered.

"Yes," I whispered back, "but he's in right of it."

"They put a hat over my eyes," she said, "and held it there tight. And I heard someone cry, and there was a sort of cough, and something splashed—into the—water——"

"Go on," said Flower.

I shall always bless Sapphira for what she did at this moment. She shuffled a foot or two nearer the Sea-Lady, put her arm round the slight figure, and gathered the wavy head right on to her capacious bosom.

"Now get it over, dearie," she said. And the Sea-Lady, comforted, went on steadily through her tears.

"When they took the hat off again, the poor thing was gone, and his canoe was floating on the waves with nothing in it. So then we went on for hours and hours more. And at first they were kind, but by and by——" She shook as she talked; I could see Sapphira take up her hand, and stroke it.

"They said a great many things in their own language and then they began to fight, and one man kissed me, and another struck him with a knife, and he fell down. So it was dark then, and I said a prayer to God, and said, 'Good-bye, Cedric——'"

I could see Flower wince.

"And—I didn't tell you, but it was stormy, and they had been drinking, and they kept letting the cutter run up into the wind, and did not manage her at all well, so I was not much afraid they would pick me up: you see I can swim rather well. And I jumped overboard. And the cutter swept on ever so fast, and I never saw her again. But the next thing I knew about, I was floating somewhere in smooth water, and then I saw the shore."

She gave a long sigh of relief, as if she had but that moment reached land, after hard battling with the waves.

"I think the cutter must have passed quite close to Croker Island. Something that was floating hit me on the head, and after that I couldn't remember anything. This morning, when I saw those men, it was like a flash of lightning going through my head—and I remembered."

"What about the return of the boat?" asked Flower.

She was calmer now; she had, on the whole, stood the trying examination amazingly well.

"Oh, that," she said. "They talked Greek for the most part. I know a little—ancient Greek, of course, but it allowed me to guess what language they were using. And once in a way they would burst out in a sentence of pigeon English. As far as I could make out, some of them were to be left on Ku-Ku's island, and the rest return for them, but I don't know how soon. Is it very valuable?"

"There's no reason for making a mystery about it," said Flower. He put his hand in his trouser-pocket and pulled out a bit of bluish rock. "Do you know what that is?" he asked of the company in general. Jim was the only one to reply, and he said, "Not I," with the true goldminer's contempt for any and every mineral but one.

"That," said Flower impressively, "is about the finest specimen of phosphate rock that I've ever seen. And the island is mostly made of it."

"My colonial oath!" was Jim's comment.

"What is phosphate rock?" I asked.

"Stuff that makes more fortunes than gold ever made

—though I don't suppose Todd would subscribe to that. It's used in any number of manufactures, and the supply of it known to exist in the world is strictly limited. It's really a sort of fossilised guano; this island must have been the home of millions of sea-birds for hundreds of years, in prehistoric times, but some unknown cause or other evidently drove them away. That happens sometimes, but for the most part these phosphate islands betray themselves by the clouds of man-of-war birds, and the collection of modern guano you find on top—which is, of course, exceedingly valuable too. I think Ku-Ku must have known about it, and, in the way these natives seem to have, kept it to himself for fear of his own private treasure being looted."

"That's been the way," agreed Jim. "When the natives know there's gold in a place, they keep it dark if they can. They don't want the white people about, even if there's no special cache of their own, like there was here."

"So we've found a fortune?" I asked.

"We have. But as to keeping it . . . It all depends on whether the Greeks had savvy enough to recognise it. You see, if they did, they would go to Port Moresby at once—some of them—and put in a claim for a grant, blocking anyone else. But if it was simply Ku-Ku's stuff they were after, they'd be more likely to run and get stores, and just loot the place of all it had. You can't get a lease of shell-beds out in the sea—no doubt they are all round this island—and there would be no sense letting other people into the secret."

"In the meantime," observed Sapphira dryly, "we're left on this God-forsaken place for God knows how long, with them beasts trying to shoot us every

turn, and—what's to prevent us going blind the same way they did? I always told you Ku-Ku had pouri-pouried the place proper. You would laugh at me, and you would laugh at poor Carl who's dead and gone—— "

"God rest his soul!" said Catholic Jim, crossing himself.

"But now you know it ain't anything to laugh at. People who comes to this island goes blind. That's what they always did say in Ku-Ku's time, and I told you I seen the man who did, and so did Carl, and he was as blind as bats or moles is, or as them black-faced devils up there on top. And every one of us will be blind too in another few days. And then we'll be feeling round the island looking for one another, and they'll be looking too, and they'll find us with them guns of theirs, sooner or later. Oh, a nice place this is that you men have found and brought us to, isn't it?"

"We never should have brought——" I was beginning, but Flower interrupted me.

"You're not very old, Ireland," he said, "but you're old enough to have learned by this time that nothing in the world really matters except the thing that *is*. If people would only cut out the time they spend thinking of what ought to have been, and ought not to have been, and might have been, and so on, life would be a deal simpler, and a deal longer. Let's drop what anyone should have done. We're here and we're in a difficulty, I grant Mrs. Gregg so much. But I don't agree with her we're all bound to fall into the same hole. Ku-Ku didn't, and his famous twenty sons didn't, by all that one has heard. There must be some way of avoiding the danger, and it's up to us to find that out."

There was silence for a space after that. I think we

were all tired with the events of the day—it is tiring to be chased and shot at, and to lose your ship, and to find yourself facing unknown, unheard-of dangers, all within an hour or two. Or else we had talked ourselves out for the moment. At any rate nobody spoke for quite a while. In the silence we could hear the creaming of the waves upon the little beach, and the suck and slap of the deep water along the impregnable outer walls of the island. Very far off the reef sang angrily, not the low, dreamy saga that is the true song of the coral reefs, but the deep-voiced murmur that comes only in the hours before or after storm. The sun was westering: it shot low into our cave, and made, with the sea reflections, golden water on the wall.

Somehow—I speak for myself, and I think for others too—that sad golden light that is, since the days of Dickens, inevitably linked with the thought of death; the melancholy noises of the sea; the feeling of being far and far away, beyond the knowledge of men, laid a weight upon our minds which was felt by everyone, though no one gave it voice. We wondered—I know—for how long we were to live within sound of those slapping waves; for how long the cruel reefs, so murderous to ships, were to hold us in their prison. We wondered what would be the end of it all: whose bones, at the last, would whiten on the rocks: whose eyes, in this home of devilish things and happenings, would darken suddenly to the sun. But we did not wonder about one thing—whether the Sea-Lady, left the last, might fall once more into the hands of the wretches who had almost driven her to death before. There was not one of us men who did not know, and would not have used, the way to save her from that.

The silence was broken by Sapphira.

"What I want to know," she said, "is what we are going to do for our *things*."

"What things?" I asked.

"Everything. Brushes and soap and clean stockings and Florida water, and nighties, and basins to wash our faces and cups to drink our teas in and——"

"Plenty of clean sand," said Jim cheerfully.

"Lord help the man, we can't dress in sand, or wash in it."

"You can do both, Sapphira," corrected Jim. "When you have all your clothes in the wash and hung out on a bush to dry, you can dress yourself in the nice warm sand—dig a hole, you know, and leave your head out—and you can have a real good dry scrub in it too, when you feel the dirt getting too thick."

"Jim Todd, do you think I would ever on this earth——"

"We'll all come to it yet, Sapphira. Hang out our clothes on the trees of a Monday morning, and dig ourselves in in a row till they're dry. I'll let you dig yourself in first, Sapphira, and then I'll dig next to you, and our two heads will stick up on the sand like two melons ripening in the sun, and we'll converse till our things are dry, exceedingly proper and convenient."

"Jim Todd, you're perfectly indecent."

"No, Sapphira, it would be very decent indeed, much decenter than the evening dresses they wear at the Port Moresby balls, because there's a lot more outside of them than just the head, Sapphira."

"I won't talk to you no more," said the mistress of Croker Island. "You twist things round that way——"

"Thank goodness we've got coconuts," I broke in.

It did not seem to me a happy occasion for another of Jim and Sapphira's rows.

"Cups," said Jim. "Baskets. Mattresses."

"Lamps and oil," said I.

"Canvas for blankets," said Flower.

"Coconut milk," laughed the Sea-Lady. I was glad to see her take a part in the game of cheering up.

"Whisky," said Jim, smacking his lips.

"You mean arrack," remarked Flower.

"Drink, cursed der-rink, anyhow," said Jim. "Thank goodness we've a pound or two of trade tobacco." We had put it in on the off-chance of finding natives.

"We shan't do too badly," said Flower. "What lucky providence was it that induced Carl to load up with a month's supplies?"

"No providence at all," said Jim. "You're a newcomer. Those of us who know New Guinea know what these reefy islands are. Why, this is the sort of place no boat could ever approach except in a dead calm."

"Then how did Ku-Ku get to it?"

"Must have kept away the whole of the sou'-west season, and only come during the nor'-west, when it's either gales or calms, not steady blow all the time as it is from April to November."

Flower took this in, and I saw his big lantern eyes fix themselves as he mused on it. He pulled out a pencil-end from his pocket by and by and made a note on the white wall.

"Why do you do that?" asked the Sea-Lady.

"We have got a difficult problem to solve," said Flower. "It's like the old fairy stories where a man had to guess a riddle that nobody ever had guessed, or have his eyes put out. That's just what's up to us.

And all we can do is to accumulate every little fact that may bear on any peculiarity of the island. No use talking about pouri-pouri. There's a material reason for every material phenomenon that happens on this earth."

"Right," said Jim. "Does something whisper supper in your ear?"

"It does," agreed Flower.

Sapphira heaved herself up from the sand.

"You make the fire," she said, "and leave the rest to me."

She did well for us, from the miscellaneous stores provided by the foresight of ill-fated Carl. We had hot stew out of a tin, tea, apricots, and hot-buttered damper baked in ashes. Afterwards, while light still lingered in the sky, Jim went up to the top and had a look round.

"They've turned in, I reckon," he said. "No sign of them anywhere. I brought the spare mainsail that the tins were slung aboard the boat in; the boys didn't remember to take it back with them. It'll make some sort of a bed for the women."

"What are you going to have?" said the Sea-Lady.

"We don't want anything." He dumped the mass of heavy canvas at her feet.

"Shall we need this sail to sail away again?"

"Not likely. They'll send out to look for us some time or other."

"Then please cut it in two and take half." She would have it, and there was no gainsaying her. I will not say that, later on, we were not very glad of it.

Flower and Jim collected bracken, of which there was plenty on the slope, and piled it up for beds. We gathered wood for the morning, assigned the inner part

of the cave to the women, and found ourselves a comfortable spot near the narrow part of the entrance.

"Smoke before turning in," said Flower. "Leave the women time to settle down." We went out on the narrow beach. The heat had ceased with the going down of the sun, as if a tap had been turned off somewhere in the sky. The anger of the reef was calming down; it only sobbed and murmured in its sleep, far away at sea, while here at our feet the little waves ran up among shells and coral, soft and gentle as velvet-pawed baby lionets. You never would have thought that that great cruel creature out at sea was their mother. . . .

From the narrow space of sky above the cliff-held beach, white stars looked down. The sun was set, and there was no moon; but a clear pale after-glow lingered in the sky, showing me plainly the rugged features of Flower, and the grave expression into which they had relaxed now that Sapphira and the Sea-Lady were no longer near us. Jim looked as gay and careless as ever; but Jim's face was ever a false index to his feelings. Somehow I gathered that neither of them liked the situation.

Flower lit his pipe and took a whiff or two before he spoke.

"The thing is," he said by and by, taking the pipe out of his mouth, and looking at it, "that they're afraid. They must have recognised the moment Sapphira's whisper gave us away that people were there, and that it wasn't their people. Now they have committed two murders; they don't know but what we've come about that matter—which, by the by, the Government will have to deal with sooner or later."

He looked at his pipe again, as if seeking counsel from it; put it back in his mouth and went on,

"Also they've come here after a pretty big treasure —for them—of shell-money, and possibly they know about the phosphate, though somehow I don't think it. What's that Greek Malay black-and-tan colony about the Trebriands and D'Entrecasteaux like?" he asked Rocky Jim. "I don't mean as to character; I know they're a bad lot. Have they any education?"

"Shouldn't think any lovely delightful one of the darling angels," said Jim (I have taken the liberty of translating his words), "could write his own beautiful name."

"Oh," said Flower. He smoked for a minute or two. "Watch and watch, of course," he said. Jim nodded. The Yodda miner was familiar with midnight watchings. "Toss for first watch," he suggested. He won the toss himself.

"You can take the four o'clock watch, Ireland," said Flower. "I'll keep the middle one." I knew he had taken the hardest of the three, but that was like Flower.

Nevertheless, it was the morning watch that brought the trouble. I do not think any of us had expected to hear from the men on the top of the island. We kept our watches more from a desire to leave no loophole open to accident than from any fear of it. When I woke in the night, as I did several times, I saw either Jim's figure or Flower's seated in the narrow entrance of the cave, a dark mass blotting out some scores of stars; I heard the water slapping on the island walls, and the small waves tinkling down the beach. No more.

My own turn came. I sat in the opening, wide-eyed and quiet, looking now at the beach, grey-ivory under

the stars, now at the whitish glacis of fallen rock that led to the tableland above; now at the upper skyline. You could not have seen anything if you had come out of a light room; but I had been asleep with shut eyes, and after twenty minutes or so of sitting still and looking into the darkness, I found it half transparent. No doubt the reflecting powers of the sea lying all about us helped towards this result; it is never very dark on a small island.

I suppose I might well have been startled, but I was not, I was not even surprised, when, about half-past four o'clock—the hour you may expect sleep to be at its deepest, and unarmed men most helpless—I saw something stirring on the sky-line of the cove. . . .

I watched it for a minute, until it had passed the line of the sky, vanished, and appeared again as a grey shadow on the darker grey of the glacis. Then I edged into the cave, and laid my hand on Jim. I knew how the miner of the Yodda would awake. They slept with an eye and a half open, and a cocked revolver held in both hands, about the Yodda field, in those not very far-off days.

Jim was instantly and quietly alert. He put his hand over Flower's mouth as a precaution, before rousing him; but the big man woke without a sound. We all crawled to the opening, and craned our heads out, low down towards the ground.

One of the Greeks was coming, with amazing silence and sureness, down the rocks of the glacis. He had his revolver in his hand. We did not need to tell each other that the man probably knew all about the cave. What we wanted to know was—could he see?

"Some kinds blindness see at night," whispered

Flower, with infinite precaution. We watched; I don't know why we held our breath, but I think we all did. It was very still; the tide was at ebb, like the night, and the sea was almost silent. I heard the land-crabs scuttering among the rubbish at high-water mark; a mopoke cried suddenly, once, like a child, in the bush, and was quiet.

Then we saw the Greek again, making his way along the beach. Away from the rocks of the glacis, where he could guide himself by feeling, he seemed none too sure of himself, but I did not think he was stone-blind, by the way he held his head. He crossed the beach, keeping to the line of rubbish thrown up by the waves: whether this was accidental or not I could not tell. We saw him clearly enough against the scintillating stars (you must remember our heads were low down), but he could not, we thought, see us. He struck the wall of rock some yards from the cave opening, and began feeling his way along without a sound. He stuck out his chin now and then in a way a man does when he is trying hard to see. It was plain that he would reach the opening in a few more seconds. He seemed to know this; he shifted his revolver in his hand. . . .

Jim and Flower got to their feet. I saw a swift word pass between them; I heard nothing. Afterwards, Jim told me that Flower said he was going to tackle the man first; if there had been time to argue, he said, he would have stuck out for his own rights, but it wasn't the moment for yarning. . . .

I, who had no part in this, kept in the background, and prayed to "whatever gods there be" that the women might not awake and speak. For, with the slightest sound to guide him, the Greek would fire, and

at such range even a half-blind man would have a chance of bagging something.

The Greek, moving soundlessly on bare feet, crept a little nearer—halted, felt with one hand along the rock for the opening. . . .

I saw Flower's great back, outlined against the stars, quiver as a cat quivers before she makes her leap. Then with all the love and fear behind the force that hurtled him on to the Greek, he sprang. The man staggered back beneath his weight, recovered himself with amazing quickness, and fought like a devil. Jim danced round them for a moment, looking for his chance, and then, quick as a dog snatching a bone, plucked the Greek's pistol out of the *mêlée*. The man was struggling to get at his knife. I knew, and Jim knew, that he could beat Flower at that game if he once got going. I clenched my fists so tight that the nails cut the palms. Even if I had the strength of a normal man —or of two—there was no way of interfering. . . .

Then I saw what Jim was after, and in another moment saw him do it. I can't tell you how it was done, or how he avoided shooting Flower—not one man in fifty would have taken the chance. But a certain sure recklessness was the moulding stuff of Rocky Jim's character. He fired right into the middle of the *mêlée*, and got the Greek.

Flower, in a sudden collapse of all resistance, stumbled forward and fell on the other man. He picked himself up with almost ludicrous quickness ("I thought the beggar would have his knife into me," he explained afterward), and stood ready to attack again.

But there was no need. The Greek lay still, and all spilled out on the ground as only a dead man lies. It

was almost five now, and being near the longest day, dawn was at hand. We dragged the dead body away from the mouth of the cave, and left it until the light should come. Then we went back to see what the women were doing.

"Can I strike a match?" asked Flower, coming to the mouth of the communicating cave that we had given up to Sapphira and Lady Mary.

"Wait till I get my teeth in," came the answer, in Sapphira's voice. Then, with clearer utterance, "Strike away. Did you get him good?"

"Jim did," said Flower.

"I wouldn't have, if you hadn't have got hold of him," corrected Jim. The match had been struck, and by its light we saw Sapphira and the Sea-Lady, sitting up under the piece of sailcloth. Sapphira was twirling up the huge coil that usually ornamented the top of her head. The Sea-Lady, in a mist of dark loosened locks, sat leaning her hands on the sand, and looking at us with startled eyes like the eyes of some soft furry creature disturbed at night in its nest. She seemed scarce awake.

"Has there been a man killed?" she asked. "Did you . . ." She looked at Flower, and I saw fear in her eyes.

"I had not the honour of defending you so far, though I was willing," he answered. Jim seemed to size up the situation.

"I plugged him," he said. The match was out; nobody lit another. "You don't need to be shocked, Lady Mary. I hope we'll all have one to our credit before very long. They're fair cows, and we've got to get them before they get us. Or you."

I heard her sigh a little as she lay down again. Sea-Lady! Sea-Lady! I would have coined my heart's blood to save you even that one sigh. In truth, this wild place at the end of the world, with fierce men fighting for their lives and for more than your life, was no place for you. But complaint was not in you—beyond that sigh. Flower would have given twenty years of his life for the right to kiss it away. How do I know? Because I would have given all the rest of mine.

It was morning very soon, and we all went out on the sand, that was wondrously cool under our feet, after the freshness of the night, though by and by we should have to put on our shoes, or scorch our soles as on the deck of a burning ship, when we crossed over it. We looked at the dead man. He was for all the world like the brother of the corpse that had come ashore on Croker Island: but these mixed half-caste races are wonderfully alike. The bullet had gone through his chest; he seemed to have died almost at once, and bled hardly at all.

We examined his eyes with care, but could see nothing whatever wrong with him, even with the aid of Flower's medical knowledge.

"All the same, he was as blind as a bat in the daylight, and pretty near blind at night," declared Jim. "Nice sort of an island, I don't think."

Jim and Flower carried him to the top, tied a stone to his feet, and dumped him over the cliff into deep water. They saw no sign of the other men. It was plain to us by now that the Greeks kept within their cave during the daytime as a rule, and only went abroad at night, when one of them, possibly all, could see a little.

"We've got a revolver now, at all events," said Jim cheerfully, as the two returned to the beach. "Only

two cartridges left in it—he must have been popping with it during the day—but that's better than nothing."

The Sea-Lady had come out, and was standing on the beach, her clothes a-flutter in the sunrise wind, the sunrise light of youth upon her face. How young she was! I felt my one and thirty years old beside the narrow tale of hers; and I felt glad, spitefully glad, that Flower was six years older.

"Thirty-seven," I said to myself. "Near forty—why he's middle-aged." It did not occur to me to think of Jim, who might have had a year or so more, as verging on elderliness. But then . . .

"Are you going to shoot the Greeks with that revolver?" Lady Mary asked of Flower. I saw she was standing nearer to him than to Jim or me, although there was, one might say, an amplitude of room on the beach. I do not think she knew she was doing it.

"If we can," he answered.

"You could not shoot them all with it?" she said.

"No," answered Flower.

"There would be some left?"

"It looks so."

"And you might all be killed?"

"Let's hope nothing so unpleasant will happen."

"But if you were—Sapphira and I——?"

"Sapphira and you——?"

"Don't make me say it," she said, turning, I thought, a little paler.

"I won't," said Flower, with that direct, kind way of his. "I know what you mean. You are afraid of falling into their hands. You won't, Lady Mary, and you won't need to keep those cartridges for yourself and Sapphira either. Jim"—he beckoned to the miner—

"It's time we talked this matter out. See that Sapphira and Lady Mary aren't left alone at any time when they are outside the cave; not for a minute. You and I will divide the duty. Don't you feel bad, now, Ireland." (I don't know how he knew; his back had been towards me till he turned to speak.) "You're as good a man as any of us but for one thing, that you can't run very fast. You've got to be the bravest man of us all."

"How is that?" I asked him.

"For this reason," said Flower, strolling away a little out of the earshot of the women. "You can't defend yourself very well, since defence may mean simply clearing out one-time, at any moment, and—Jim and I can't defend you. It will take all we can do to look after the women. Each of them must have a strong arm and a quick pair of feet near her all the time, in case of those devils trying a snap-shot—you must remember we can't be sure how much they are or are not able to see. But you, Ireland—you with your lameness"—I liked the clean simple way he spoke of it—"you must face the music alone. They've got you once—how is that arm this morning, by the way?" He began untying it as he talked—"because you couldn't be quick enough. And they may get you again. Yours is the worst risk, but all the same, I depend upon you."

"Right," said I. And it was understood without further words that if lives were to be sacrificed, or risks taken to save another, mine might be the forfeit.

Flower looked at the wound with a professional eye.

"Not too bad," he said, "but would be better for some iodine. We'll burn a pile of seaweed; get it down to ashes, and then I'll tell you what to do. Carl slung in a thousand table bottles of quinine with the

stores, because apparently that *is* stores, in New Guinea, but nothing else. I needn't tell you to keep up heart; you don't need to be told. . . . We must keep the women cheerful."

"Do you think it a bad business all round?" I asked.

He did not answer for a moment or two.

"I don't know," he said presently. "The worst thing is that eye trouble, whatever it is."

"Can't you make a shot at it?" I asked, remembering the medical training of which he had told us.

"Not a guess—or, rather, so many guesses that none of them is any good. Where there's an effect, there's a cause. Island only inhabitable from November till March—full of caves—has been a guano island countless ages ago—might be a line of enquiry, and might not, behind any one of those facts. Let's come back; I think Sapphira has made breakfast. Afterwards we'll tally off the stores, and have them served out properly. No knowing how long they may have to last."

It was an odd meal, the first breakfast of ours on the island. We ate it inside the cave, lest any of the Greeks should by chance be possessed of enough sight to come to the edge of the glacis and send a bullet into the midst of us. Sapphira cooked in emptied tins. Jim had picked up a few broken coconuts on the beach, trimmed them into cups with his knife, and cleaned them with sand. There was some wild taro growing among the stones of the glacis; its great flat leaves, two or three feet across, made ample plates for our food, and small shells were no bad substitute for spoons. When we had done, and Sapphira, who scorned any aid, had rinsed the cups in the trickle of fresh water that ran down the wall

of the outer cave, we laid out all the stores and counted them. There was enough for something under four weeks, carefully managed.

"Of course," said Flower, "we'll use them as little as possible, and try for all the stuff we can find in the shape of wild vegetables, or fruit or fish, or coconuts. As this is pretty important, I think we'll have a hunt over the island. Do you know anything about botany in general, Jim? I'm no great hand at it."

"Ask our scientific man," suggested Jim. "I don't know a pea from a prussic-acid bean."

"Is there a prussic-acid bean?" asked Sapphira suspiciously.

"Why not?" said Jim firmly, and no one seemed to be able to answer the enquiry, though I saw the word "Potassium" trembling on Flower's lip. He turned away, stroking his moustache.

"Well, come along," he asked me; "can you name any useful things?"

"I'm an entomologist," I said, "but you can hardly take that up as a profession without running more or less into botany."

"No, I see that. So you're going to be the chief character of our boys' romance—desert island——"

"Desert—no such luck," growled Jim.

"Desert island according to the usual specifications," persisted Flower. "And you know there always has to be a character who has seen all the plants before, and knows what they are good for."

"I remember," said Jim. "About the milk tree that gives milk, and the boot-trees—I read about them in a Yank magazine—where you can pick a pair of Wellingtons or a satin slipper number small two, and the shrub

that grows rum shrub for the bad characters, and the——"

"Really," I broke in, for I was feeling a little excited and rather important, "the most awful mistakes are made about those matters. Practically all the food plants except coconuts are cultivated, and——"

"Suppose we go and solve the problem by walking, according to the classics," suggested Flower.

"Oh, I must go too," said the Sea-Lady. "I always did love boys' books better than girls', and it's really most exciting to be in a desert island adventure."

"Certainly," said the surveyor. "Jim, I know, will take good care of Sapphira. We don't want to leave the stores unguarded."

"I wouldn't presume to take care of Sapphira," said Jim. "I hope she'll take care of me. Won't you, Sapphira? I'd like to be told some more about all my bad habits. Tell me about how I smoke more than is good for my health—I just love to hear that—and how I had three more whiskies than I ought to have had last time I went down to Samarai for a bit of fun. And tell me again how you've got no patience with me, and how you wish I was dead. I think it's good for me to hear that."

Sapphira eyed him much as one might imagine a handsome gold-eyed wasp would eye something or someone who had painlessly drawn its sting, and presumed to mock it. We left them to discuss the rules of conduct and started on our trip.

There was not a sign of any one of our enemies about. On the top of the island the wind blew free, and the grasses were shaking. The place was not very large; and you could see the rim of sea all round it—sea

wonderfully coloured, like sheets of chrysoprase and opal, where the reefs ran under, and shading, through pink and lemon-ivory colour, into the blue of deeper waters.

We walked, with caution, past the mouth of the cave, Flower taking the lead. It had been blocked up inside in a most ingenious way, with piles of beer and whisky bottles, arranged so that a touch would cause them to fall down with hideous clatter.

"No catching those weasels asleep," remarked Flower, after we had passed by. "I think there is not much danger from them in the daytime. It looks to me as if the blindness that haunts this place didn't work so completely at night, and in that case——"

"There's a banana. I saw them in the West Indies," remarked Lady Mary.

"Oh," said Flower. "Have you remembered about the big ship with the guns, and how it brought you here?"

"What ship?" said the Sea-Lady innocently. And I saw, and he saw, that the door had closed again. But she had made advance all the same. She never hesitated for an ordinary word now, and I knew that her remembrance of greater things than those we wished to know had returned to her, for—dare I tell it?—I had heard her, through the dusk and silence of the cave, murmuring her innocent little prayers, after we had all gone to rest.

"Well, you've made the first score," said Flower. We stopped beneath the banana. It was a very tall one, I suppose twenty feet in height, with a great bunch of fruit at the top.

"I beg your pardon," I corrected him; "that is a wild banana."

"What!"

"Yes. The bunch of fruit stands right up instead of drooping down. That would prove it alone, but knock down some of it with a stone if you want. . . . There! Uneatable, you see, and full of seeds."

"No score, decidedly," said Flower. "And score one to me, for I see citrons. I know you can't eat wild citrons, but you can drink them all right." We loaded ourselves with a few of the great round rough golden fruits, and passed on.

"Score one," cried the Sea-Lady excitedly. She had found a bush with small green fruits.

"Now, Swiss Family Robinson," urged Flower. "Don't let her cheat. That is uneatable, I'll bet my hat."

"It is," I pronounced.

"Forfeit, Lady Mary," cried the surveyor.

"No," I said, "for she's got the best thing yet—candlenuts. These have an oily kernel that you can string on a coconut leaf rib; they burn down and down, and are as good as any candle."

The Sea-Lady rejoiced, mocking at Flower in a way that I think he enjoyed, and that I know I did not. We hunted industriously, and Flower presently declared that he had found raspberries, but that it wasn't possible, so they must be a delusion. I told him they were real, but never much good below two thousand feet level.

"Cherries," said Lady Mary. "Score one."

I had a look at them. They were too long for my fancy, more like red peppers in shape. I tasted one. It was not bad, rather agreeable than otherwise, but as I could not identify the fruit, I preferred to let it alone,

spitting out, for precaution, the one I had put in my mouth.

"We'll give you half a mark till we try it on a bird or something," I suggested. Lady Mary laughed pertingly.

"You are none of you playing fair," she said.

We continued our walk, but found nothing more until we got down to the beach, where I, rather unfairly, scored two at once, by telling Flower that the beach hibiscus, with the yellow flowers, furnished excellent fibres, and that the red hibiscus we saw growing on the glacis was admirable for blacking shoes. "You rub the petals on your shoes," I explained.

"That oughtn't to count," said Lady Mary, "because we shall never black our boots at all. People on desert islands never do, I'm sure."

"Very well," I said, "I'll give that up, and put in another. I think that's the paper mulberry, growing in the gully. If there's more of it on the island, we may be very glad of it."

"We aren't likely to write many letters," objected the Sea-Lady, anxious to win her game.

"No, but we may wear out some of our clothes."

"And how on earth is a little shrub with horrid little rough leaves going to dress us?"

"It dresses most of Papua, away from civilisation. You can beat tappa cloth out of the inner bark."

"Tell me some more clothes you can get in the bush," asked the Sea-Lady, regarding me with an interest that warmed my heart.

"Haven't you seen the canvas that grows on the coconut?"

"I'm afraid I'm awfully unobservant; I haven't."

"Oh, almost nobody does notice it; I can't think why. But if you are an entomologist, of course you are always poking round the bark of trees. . . . Take a piece yourself. It's wrapped round the shoots."

She picked out a young coconut standing close to high-water mark, and reached up into its crown.

"Oh, oh, how wonderful!" she cried. "It is real canvas, brown canvas with a warp and a weft! Oh, how does the tree ever weave it? And what big pieces, like the gores of skirts. Oh, Mr. Ireland, I must have a coconut dress to-day. Where can I get needles and thread?"

"I can show you a dozen plants with excellent thread —that wild banana for one. But as to needles——" I paused; I was fairly gravelled; there are no vegetable needles of decent quality. . . .

Flower, I think, had had enough of my small triumph. If he possessed a weakness, it was the desire to lead.

"If curved needles will serve you, Lady Mary," he put in, "I can spare one for you and one for Sapphira. I've almost forgotten I ever studied medicine, but I do carry a pocket-case."

Now she turned to him, and I could see she was more grateful for that promise of a needle than for all I had found and told about. But all she said was,

"How very providential that you did study medicine. Think if anyone should be ill."

"I never practised; I did not even go up for my degree," he reminded her.

"I think we could trust you," she said; and those golden eyes of hers looked up into his. . . .

"It's beginning, it's beginning," I said to myself. "Damn it!" I thought, as I limped away along the

beach towards the cave; but what I was damning, or what I thought was beginning, I could not easily have put into words. This girl was almost certainly engaged to someone called Cedric; she was, certainly, of a disposition almost quixotically honourable; Flower was not the man to steal another man's sweetheart, especially under such circumstances. And as for me, I did not come in anywhere or anyhow. What was there to curse?

Jim, when I reached the cave, was sitting outside it, on a heap of ejected bracken, looking quizzical, and smoking a pipe.

"Where's Sapphira?" I asked.

"Making the beds," said Jim. A volley of bracken—I can call it nothing else—was fired out of the cave at the same moment, and half buried him in its descent. He shook it aside like a water-dog shaking off water. "That's one she's making," he explained. "She's swept up all the caves nicely with a coconut broom, and she's scrubbed all the opened tins with sand, and put them in rows according to size of the ridges of the walls. And she's cleaned off all the green that the water makes trickling down. It'll last nice and clean till to-morrow. And by and by she's going to tackle all that untidy stuff that the waves have thrown up close to the cave, and have it burned in a heap. And——"

"Did you stand by and let her do all that work?" I asked.

"She drove me out with the broom," explained Jim equably. "I told her all the things she ought to do, and of course she couldn't let a mere ignorant man know more than her, so she invented a few more, and then shooed me out."

"Won't she be frightfully tired?" I suggested,

listening to the sounds of scraping and throwing about that were going on inside.

"Her troubles!" was Jim's comment. "What did you find on top?"

But I was not chiefly interested, at that moment, in what we had found on top.

"Jim," I said, with what might have seemed irrelevance to an onlooker, "did you ever do any horse-breaking?"

"Whips of it," he replied, cocking a mischievous eye at me.

"Did any of them ever get the better of you?"

"Don't seem to remember it, if they did."

"How did you do it?"

"Kept them going till they was tired."

"And if they jibbed or bolted?"

"Kept them jibbing or bolting. What are you getting at, you little devil?"

"I'm trying the Socratic method on you, Jim."

"I know as much about Socrates as you do," averred Jim, and bar the pronunciation, which on his tongue rhymed to "dates," he may well have been right.

"Just answer another, Jim. What did you do with a horse when you'd broken it?"

"Your turn to answer," said Rocky Jim. "What did they do to Socrates?"

"They poisoned him," I was compelled to state.

"Moral plain," said Jim, getting to his feet. "I'm going for a walk." And I was left to reflect, not for the first time, that few people were able to boast of having "got change" out of Jim.

Nor was I altogether gratified, for once, to hear the Sea-Lady's golden laughter, close at hand.

CHAPTER VII

UNFURLING THE BANNER

NOW began our life on the island.

The first problem we had to solve was the matter of signals. It was true that few ships, or none, ever came within sight of this far outlier of Lusancays. The place was on the road to nowhere; it was dangerous even to steamers because of its uncharted reefs and fierce shifting tide-rips and currents; and to sailing vessels, as we had seen, it was deadly. Nevertheless, some chance might send a ship in our way, and we could not afford to neglect it. Probably the cutter of the half-caste Greeks would be the first to turn up. Well, that had to be risked; we thought we might be able to make them hear reason. But we hoped very hard that some surveying man-of-war, or some schooner driven out of her course, might run near enough to sight the island, before the Greek boat came.

"She is a good bit overdue," pointed out Flower. "If they went to Samarai for stores they ought to be here by now. Of course, if they went on to Port Moresby to make application for the island——"

"I don't think they did," said Jim.

"Why not?"

"Couldn't say. I just don't think it. I'm willing to suppose she's met with some bad luck. You must remember Lady Mary told us they were half-drunk."

"Well, however that may be," persisted Flower, "a signal we must have; a permanent one flying from one of the trees, and a smoke as nearly all the time as we can manage it."

"Did you ever," said Jim, "try to keep up a permanent smoke signal? It takes one man doing nothing else all the time but humping wood, and tending it—because it blazes or goes out if you don't look after it."

"Besides," put in Sapphira—we were talking in the cave, after supper on one of these first days, I can't be sure which—"the natives is always making smokes when they burn off for their gardens; no one would take any notice of a smoke on an island, anywhere about New Guinea."

"Must be a flag on the top of a palm-tree trunk then," declared Flower. "We can do without that piece of sail now, since Sapphira has made our blankets" (she had spent the whole of that day, with Lady Mary's assistance, sewing together wads of coconut canvas for the beds), "and if we cut the top off a palm it will make a fine flagstaff."

"I never saw the white man yet who could climb a coconut," remarked Jim.

"Time you did, then," was Flower's reply. And he gave us all the exhibition next day. He did not attempt the dangerous and all but impossible feat—for a white man—of "shinning" the tree. He cut sharp-ended pegs of hard wood, hammered them in with a heavy stone as far up as he could reach, and then stood on them to hammer more. In spite of his great bulk, he was exceedingly agile and active; the task was no easy one, but he carried it through. Before long, a dingy

banner of sailcloth floated from the top of the decapitated palm, carrying its message across the sea.

We were all well pleased; it seemed that a step towards freedom had been taken. . . .

But next morning the palm was lying prone on the ground, chopped off through the trunk.

Neither of the women was about when we found it. I thought it just as well; Jim would surely have burst if he had been compelled to retain in his system the flood of descriptive language that came forth when he caught sight of the chopped-down signal tree. I gathered, without much difficulty, that he held the Greeks responsible, and that he disapproved of them, singly, collectively, presently, and retrospectively, and also of all the work of their hands, past, present, and to come.

Flower put his hands in his trouser-pockets, looked at the tree, and remarked simply, "Damn."

I said that some one of the Greeks must be able to see a bit more than we thought.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the whole lot of them could see fairly well at night," mused Flower. "There was some dilation of the pupil in the case of that man that Jim shot."

"We can't signal, that's clear," I lamented.

Flower said nothing, but later on I saw him busy collecting pieces of driftwood, and aimlessly, as it seemed, carrying them to the top of the island and throwing them into the sea. After he had thrown them he would stand watching them for an hour or more. I wondered if he were going out of his senses.

"No, he isn't," said the Sea-Lady, when I gave voice to my fears. "He has something in his mind he

doesn't mean to tell." I saw how she spoke for him, and how she took it for granted that she understood him better than anyone else did.

"You don't, then," said I to myself. "Women always think they 'understand' the man they take an interest in, but as often as not they're only dressing him up in their own fancies." But aloud I only said, "Well, let's hope it is all right."

The Sea-Lady stood watching him for a minute, and then she did a curious thing. She went down to the beach, where a few of the many bottles that the Greeks had strewed about the island lay gathered in chinks and openings of the rocks. She picked up a couple of them and carried them to Flower.

"Lady Mary, Lady Mary, you mustn't wait on me," he exclaimed, turning round from his earnest gazing at the sea, and taking the bottles from her hands. "Thank you all the same." Then he seemed to awake. "How did you know I wanted these?"

The Sea-Lady stooped to tie her shoe. I, like a fool, came forward eagerly to do it for her; and then I saw that she had bent down her head to hide her face. . . .

She let me tighten the lace, the while she stood up bravely, with a tell-tale glow on her usually pale cheeks.

"I—just knew," was all she said. Then, after a pause—for I think the sudden fire in the big man's eyes was a little too warm for her to bear—"Great minds think together, you know," she said, with an air of ightness, bending down again to that troublesome shoe, and I, wiser this time, let her adjust it herself.

I went away. What else could I do?

Later, I saw them together on the beach, busy filling bottles with wide leaves on which Flower had written

some message with a thorn, and corking them up with corks that anyone of us could find for the gathering, in the neighbourhood of the cave where the Greeks kept hid all day. Flower had wax too, from the candlenuts I had discovered, and smeared the corks well with it when they were driven home. Then he and the Sea-Lady lashed the bottles to little rafts of driftwood. I stood watching for quite a while ; I did not offer to help, as I knew they would rather be left alone. . . .

It was the Sea-Lady's idea to put sails on the tiny crafts that carried our hopes of freedom. She had been knotting and fastening the fibres that secured the bottles with true sailor skill—all the work of her hands was neat, finished and effective ; there were no loose ends about Lady Mary—and by and by she took a sharp sliver of driftwood, and began hammering it into the little raft.

"Let me do that," said Flower. "What do you want ? "

"Would they not go farther and faster with sails ? " she asked.

"I was depending on the currents ; I estimate them at seven knots an hour in some places. However, the sail could do no harm."

"Let me," she pleaded. "They are such pretty toys."

Toys ! When one came to think of it, it could not have been more than five years or so since she was playing with actual toys, herself. And yet she had three men that I knew of, held in the hollow of those flower-like hands, and how many of whom I did not know ? What was it we all loved in the Sea-Lady ? I asked myself the question often enough in those days. She was

very, very pretty, but it was not that. She was young, unmarked, unfurrowed in body and mind as a lily or a bloomy peach. But it was not that. She was as brave as Nelson; as gentle as her own grandmother, and as brilliant and self-helpful as, probably, her own granddaughters would be. But you do not love a girl because she balances gracefully between the generations, catching the sunset gold and the sunrise glow alike.

Why did her world find the Sea-Lady irresistible? I might answer that question, now, by asking another. But I did not know the other in those days—not even when I looked at our Sea-Lady, and saw something in our faces, and vaguely sensed something in the pretty names we gave her, that seemed to point towards a solution of puzzles unsolved. . . .

Well! I gave it up for the moment, and pleased myself by watching her. She had hammered the slip of wood home now, and Flower had hammered one or two others on one or two other rafts. And they got the indispensable coconut canvas, and made little sails out of it, and set them cunningly on the tiny masts, so that the fairy ships would sail with anything approaching to a fair wind. And then they carried the fleet down to the sea-channel, where the tide was running out strongly towards the outer walls of the island, and put them in, and craned their necks to watch the ships go out. And afterwards, they, and we, went up to the top of the island to see the little vessels floating away and away. They went surprisingly fast, tiny as they were. We saw them make their way through the reefs as if they had each a pilot aboard, and string themselves out in the dark blue channels beyond.

"Will anyone ever find them, I wonder?" said the

Sea-Lady, looking wistfully towards the little ships. I knew what she was longing—that she, and perhaps another, were on the decks of the fairy fleet, sailing away and away from the Terrible Island. It seemed hard that the little boats could go, and that we could not. You know how it is when you write a letter to one far away, and wish, and wish that you could slip yourself inside the envelope, to go with it whither it was going. . . . Well, I think she was feeling somewhat after that fashion. And I know, so did I feel.

The fleet had better luck than the tree signal; but we did not rely on it over much. All this time, I need hardly say, the Greeks were constantly in our minds. It seemed absurd that we, two strong men and another, and two women in the full possession of health and strength, should be terrorised by the miscreants in the cave. Yet a way out of the difficulty was hard to find. They had plenty of firearms and ammunition; we had one revolver and two cartridges. They were absolutely unscrupulous as to ways and means. We knew there were many things at which we should draw the line—shooting them as they had attempted to shoot us, when we were (supposed to be) asleep, for example. This matter had been debated between us. Flower held that it could not be managed in any case, since the Greeks kept their cave thoroughly closed all daytime, and that therefore we need not discuss the idea. Jim, and for the matter of that myself, had a notion that some way might be found. But, as we were all agreed that the act was impossible to us, that made little difference.

On one thing we were agreed—that some means of making the island safe might be, and should be, found. Flower decided that, as a preliminary, he would spend a

night concealed near the Greeks' cave, and keep watch on their actions. "There's no knowing what we may pick up about them that would be of use to us," he said. Jim, cheerfully preparing to share his vigil, was curtly told to show a little common sense. "You must stay down at our own cave, and look after Lady Mary and Sapphira," explained Flower. "We can't leave them to Ireland; but I shall be very glad to have Ireland with me." So he salved the wound he could not help inflicting.

We found a place to hide ourselves in, before the sun was down. There was not much difficulty about it: the piles of overgrown coral rock near the caves furnished more refuges than one, and we had only to choose. "You find one, Ireland," said Flower, "while I take a walk round, and see none of the brutes are out."

You have seen the dolmens, menhirs, kit-cote houses, of France and England, no doubt; or if not those, photographs of them, which are common in many tourists' resorts. I fixed on a sort of natural dolmen, a little cavern made by a large rock lying on the top of two or three smaller ones. Once inside this, with the trailing vines draped down in front of the opening, not a soul could have seen us even in broad daylight, much less in the second-quarter moon that we expected. Flower and I got ourselves safely into it before the light failed, and waited. We did not dare to smoke; mosquitoes were active, and our quarters cramped. The wait promised to be a long and an uncomfortable one.

It did not last half an hour. No sooner was the light fairly out of the sky, and the thin moon climbing up from the east, than the bottle barricade began to clink furiously inside the cave. They were coming out.

Forth they came, four of them, stumbling and feeling their way. . . .

"Why," I whispered to Flower, "they're all as blind as bats."

"Wait a bit," said Flower. The fourth man walked with more certainty than the rest. He did not pause at the entrance, as they did, and then feel for the nearest rock, and sit down on it, yawning and stretching. He stood erect, and walked forward. I thought he was looking about him, though his sight was clearly not normal; he strained his head forward, lifted his chin, and peered through half-closed eyelids.

Having satisfied himself that no one was about, he spoke to the three others. They lurched forward, and took their seats on a flat rock, while the first man went into the cave again, and came back with a load of tins. I felt rather dispirited as I saw the liberal helpings of food that he distributed to the company squatted on the rock; it was clear they had plenty of everything. They ate largely, picking the meat out of the tins with their knives, and tossing it rudely down their throats. They passed round a bottle of gin, and drank out of the neck. It was a weird scene, up on the top of the lonely, windy island, under the feeble moon. The men were dressed in the rough khaki stuffs that are popular in New Guinea, away from the townships; they seemed almost to melt into their surroundings in that pale light; one could have imagined them to be so many gigantic fungi growing on the rock, but for their occasional movements. Above them, the flag-like leaves of wild bananas flapped against the sky; on the high summits of the coconuts, eighty feet in air, huge plumes, moon-silvered, writhed and beat among the glittering claws of Scorpio, and

eclipsed, and showed, and eclipsed again, the white lamps of the Southern Cross. And the wind cried in the grasses, and the lonely sea complained below.

Hunger satisfied, the Greeks rose and stretched their limbs, with animal yawns and howls. They lit pipes and smoked; they lurched about the open spaces, trying to obtain what exercise they might, after their cramped day in the cave. We heard them talking to each other, but it was all in Greek or in some bastard Græco-Malay dialect that Gilbert Murray himself could not have made head or tail of. What Flower and I guessed of their sayings was put together out of their gestures, which were, like those of all half-civilised people, very free and expressive. The three men who were completely blind seemed to be abusing the partially blind man, perhaps for having brought them to the island, perhaps for having failed to guard sufficiently against the evil that had struck the whole crew. I saw them raise their hands to heaven, and shake their fists in a kind of despairing way; and once or twice one of them struck at his blinded eyes as a dog bites at the wound that smarts and burns. The other man seemed to be trying to calm them down. We noticed that he pointed more than once to the beach below, and laid his hand upon the big navy revolver in his belt. When he did this, the other men mechanically felt for their revolvers, and one of them, once, facing down towards the caves where he supposed us to be, spat fiercely.

By and by the man who could see appeared to tell them that he was going to the beach. It had been our habit of late to sit out on the sand at dusk, cooling down after the heat of the day. I guessed that the Greek intended to try a snap shot from some safe corner, and

my heart seemed to turn over in my breast, as I realised that Jim and the women would not know he was coming, and would probably expose themselves to his fire. But Flower had seen that as soon as I did. He gathered himself up, slipped out of the shelter-hole, and whispering to me to await his return, ran soundlessly after the Greek.

I thought to myself, watching him go, that it was indeed a lucky chance that had sent us to the island provided with a pair of rubber-soled shoes apiece, for the rock climbing we expected.

"Those shoes, they are goodt thingce to take," Carl had said. "In that breaking-neck place, they may save your life." They had done that already, more than once, in the hideous game of blind-man's-buff we were compelled to play.

Left alone with the three blind men, I kept quiet, and on the watch. I knew that any unguarded movement of mine would send a hail of lead pouring in my direction, and I had no wish at all to stop a bullet—probably dum-dum'd—from one of those forty-fives. For some few minutes the men remained as they had been left, only shifting their position so far as to stand a little closer, and back to back in a triangle. It was plain that they were taking no chances. This movement brought them nearer to me, and with the temporary dying down of the wind I was able to hear clearly a few of the words that passed between them. I am no mighty Greek scholar, but I have passed my B.A. in Arts, and modern Greek is very like its ancient prototype in a large number of verbs and nouns. I was almost sure that they were talking about a box. What box? They seemed to set a value on it. . . .

"And that word is 'girl,' if I am not mistaken," I thought. "'Box' and 'girl'—what have they to do with . . ."

One of the men repeated the words; and this time he motioned with his hand towards the cave.

Instantly a new thought struck me. They were talking of something that belonged to the Sea-Lady.

If I had been attentive before, I was all one strain of attention now. I didn't hold my breath—one does not—but I remember I listened with my mouth as wide open as a frog's. That helps you to hear. I heard more; I understood another word or two, helped out by gesture. They were saying that she ought to be where her box was, and one of them kissed an imaginary maiden. . . .

I have never since then blamed juries for acquitting a murderer under the "unwritten law." In the flash of blood-lust that went through me like a jag of lightning, and left me dry-lipped and shaking, there in my hiding-hole, I understood, once for all, how men kill because of a woman, and how other men in defiance of law forgive them. . . .

And now I was not afraid, at all, of those blunt-nosed bullets of theirs. I called myself a craven for thinking such blinded brutes worthy of fear. I was determined, coldly and unalterably determined, on knowing the secret of their cave, before Flower had time to chase the seeing villain back again, or to shoot him with one of our two precious cartridges.

Have you ever been to New Zealand? Do you know the Dragon's Mouth—the cavern that is full of fiercely-boiling water for eighteen minutes and a half out of every twenty, and empty for the remaining ninety

seconds? Have you ever, in company with a guide made callous by continual risks, gone down into that cavern while it is dripping and steaming with the breath of the newly-withdrawn waters, and climbed through and out again, death dragging on the soles of your feet, before the furious flood comes back with a howl of escaping steam? Lame as I am, I have done it. I felt, that night up on top of the Terrible Island, when I crawled with exceeding care out of my hiding-hole, and made for the empty cavern, as if I were taking, once again, that nightmare trip through the Dragon's Cave. If one did not get out in time . . .

The three Greeks were listening intently for any sound from the direction of our beach; I think that may have drawn their attention off, in some degree. At all events, they did not hear me, as I crept out of the hole, rose slowly to my feet, and walked, on the balls of my toes, to the cave opening. I did not dare to light a match; the scratching would have betrayed me. I could only feel my way down the slope where we had sheltered on the day of the storm, and into the opening from which we had seen the Greek come forth. If they came back and caught me, I knew I shouldn't have a dog's chance of escaping their bullets in that confined space. But, after what I had heard, I just had to go, and that was all there was to it.

The cave was not nearly so large as I had expected. Four or five short strides, even of my lame leg, brought me across it. "Ten feet or so," I thought. I tried it the other way; it was two or three yards longer. No doubt there were other caves. I hoped I had got the right one. I got down on my hands and knees and began clawing round the walls. If they had a box, it was ten

to one they would use it as a seat ; in that case, I should find it somewhere on the floor.

I came across a number of other things—blankets, coconut shells, heaps of oil tins, loose bottles ; and more than once only the greatest care saved me from making a noise by displacing some of these miscellaneous goods. But no box. I stood up and felt round the walls. I was almost frantic. It could not be long till the man who could see returned, or until some alarm connected with his absence caused the others to seek refuge in the cave—indeed, I wondered that nothing had happened yet. Surely Flower must have caught up the Greek—surely the three outside would know by this time that everything was not right. . . . Was that one of them coming back? I halted, scarcely daring to breathe. No. I had only heard the sound of water dripping somewhere in unknown crevices. The men were still outside. I fumbled on about the walls. Surely I must have gone almost round . . .

My fingers struck on something smooth and hard. In the same instant, I heard an unmistakable sound of scuffling outside. They were coming back!

I grabbed the thing I had touched ; it was undoubtedly a box, small, and covered with something that felt like leather. I got out of the cave as quickly as I could ; there was some little light from the sky on the way back, although coming in I had been in utter darkness. Could I get up the slope in time? . . . were they . . .

Against the spangled violet of the night rose up three dense black shadows. I was trapped.

There was only one thing .to do—flatten myself against the wall of the descending passage, and hope for

the best. If any one of the men happened to touch me in passing, I did not rate my chances of escaping very high. Apart from my lameness, and apart from the pistols they carried, every one of the men was exceedingly handy with a knife, like all his kind, and could whip a blade out of his belt, and into something warm and human, while a more civilised type of man would be wondering if there was really anything there. I squeezed myself up against the dank limestone of the passage, and hoped the Greeks might walk fairly straight.

They came grunting and shambling down the slope; one of them was smoking a cigarette. It fell out of his mouth; he stooped, felt about for it, and picked it up again, striking a match to relight it. My heart gave a horrid jump as the flame shot up, but I realised almost at once that they could not see me, and that I had now an opportunity to glance at the box. The match flickered, wavered, went out. But I had had a look. I was carrying a leather-covered dressing-case.

After that I would have faced the devil himself to get my booty safely away, for I was certain that the case was our Sea-Lady's. It might have papers inside. It might have jewellery. It might have all sorts of things that would serve to identify her . . . if only I could get safely away.

Two of the men passed me with a wide margin of safety. I flattened myself against the wall of the cavern, and felt as one does when one is overtaken by a train in a tunnel or cutting, with no "refuge" at hand to get into. The third man was walking unsteadily; he smelt strongly of gin, and I made no doubt he had more than his share of the bottle they had been handing round.

He passed me with the smallest possible margin, and then, staggering slightly, stretched out one hand to steady himself against the wall. The hand descended flat upon my face.

He raised a wild whoop, and snatched at my nose with one hand, while with the other he fumbled about his belt. If he had not been half drunk, there would have been the end of Owen Ireland. But providentially he was, and that gave me the moment I wanted to duck away. Of course, the other two had flung round instantly, and they were sober. Cursing me in Greek—I can't say how strange those fragments of academic culture sounded, in such a place, and from such lips as theirs—they made for me like dogs falling on a hare.

I had not time to think—one acts by instinct in such moments as these. There was just light enough from the starry sky and the pale moon outside the cave for me to see where I was going. I dodged, but not into the open passage and out at the entrance way. Instinct shouted to me to get back—where they would least expect me to go—into the cave.

In their eagerness to seize me, they had collided against each other, but they drew apart at once, and all three swung round towards the cave mouth, fired in the direction of the opening—("They would have got me sure with that," I said to myself)—and then stumbled and scrambled out. I went after them, as quietly as I could, thanking Heaven and Carl again for those rubber shoes. They never thought of guarding the cave mouth, but spread themselves out beyond it, near the rocky table where they had supped, and stood listening, their revolvers in their hands. The night had become very still, there was not a sound but the faint breathing of the

Pacific, far below, and, now and again, the winnowing of some huge fruit-bat's wings. I saw the men stand silhouetted against the stars; you might have thought them images of black stone. . . .

Now this was a pretty pickle, because I could not, like Flower or Rocky Jim, move easily without making a noise. My lameness handicapped me; I never could be sure the weak foot would not drag. It was impossible for me to steal past those three listening forms, on the track, and if I got off it the rustling of the grasses would have been as good—or as bad—as a bell about my neck. I saw nothing for me to do but keep quiet in the cave-mouth, ready to move as soon as I saw a chance. "I wonder," I thought to myself, "if I'll be alive in five minutes' time—in half an hour?" and I looked up, with mingled curiosity and awe, to the glorious spangling of the stars overhead. Was their secret, in a little while, to be mine? . . .

Then I remembered that whatever wonders and glories might be the heritage of my departed soul, voyaging loose in the universe, there would not be, from the outermost of the far-fixed stars to the near familiar moon roaming now among the silvered vanes of the palm trees, the face of one dear woman, the sound of her golden voice. And eternity seemed cold. And more than ever I was resolved that my life should not end here and now, at the will of these eyeless brutes.

"I know she's not for me," I thought, "but I want to be on the same earth with her, as long as she treads it. If she were in Tasmania, and I at Klondyke, it would still be something to know that the same old world held us both—that we went spinning round the sun together." I clutched the leather dressing-case more

tightly under my arm, and swore that I would get away clear with it—to her.

I don't really know how I intended to manage the business, but I am sure I should have worked out some plan or other. As it was, fate decided for me; I had not been standing there in the cave mouth for more than a minute or so, when I heard the noise of feet running hard along the track, and of a voice shouting something in Greek. The man who could see was coming back.

What he said must have been a warning, for the other three men, dropping their hunt after me, made for the cave opening as fast as they could, arms stretched out, and hands feeling the way. They could not go very fast; I saw that I might have time, covered by the noise of their movement, to get out of the cave, pass the Greeks somehow or other on the track, and get myself hidden before the fourth man arrived. But it would be touch and go. If I could have moved as quickly as Flower . . .

Well, I could not, and that was all there was to it. I crept at the best speed I could muster along the wall of the entrance slope, reached the opening, and slung myself round the corner of it just as the first of the three men groped his way to the place where I had been standing a couple of seconds before. I cast a look down the track. White moon, and the trembling shadows of palms; a fruit-bat winging through the stars; the night-wind stirring the plumes of the pampas-grass. As yet, no more. I scuttled out on to the track. Pat-pat came the feet, drawing nearer; he would be in sight immediately. Reckless of making sound now, I flung myself into the cave refuge where Flower and I had been keeping watch. I barked elbows and knees; I

wrenched one foot cruelly; I knocked the wind out of my lean body as I fell—but I fell inside. And just as I fell, I heard the feet come pat-pat up behind me, and pass me like the wind.

No, he had not seen. He was in a hurry to get back to the cave; no doubt he had looked neither to the right nor to left, but kept straight on. It had been a very narrow escape. I hugged the box tighter. We were nearly out of the wood now. The Greek rushed down the cave slope, and in another minute I heard a babel of voices beginning. I got up and out, and in spite of my lameness and my wrenched foot, went hobbling at a pretty good pace towards the slope and the way to the beach. It would not take them long to talk things over, and if they started hunting for me with the help of the man who could see . . .

"Flower!" I gasped. The big surveyor was coming back.

"Why, Ireland!" he said, halting. "Did the brute get away?"

"He's into the cave by now," I said. "I hope to God he——"

"Oh no, he didn't get anyone. He saw me, worse luck, or I'd have had him; it would have been worth risking one of our cartridges. This isn't a healthy place just now; we'd best get back."

I was with him there; the whole length of the pathway lay open to fire, and the moon was climbing higher and growing brighter every minute.

"Give us your arm," said Flower. We hurried along together. "No use chasing after him now," regretted the big man. "He's safe. What have you got under your arm?"

"Box. Dressing-case," I gasped. We were slamming along at a five-mile gait; I really don't think he knew that he was hauling me like a bundle of wash.

"Dressing-how-much? Is it a joke?"

"It's Lady Mary's," I panted.

Flower, with the steady remembrance of the job in hand that always characterised him, got me and himself under the lee of the slope before he stopped and burst out,

"Where did you get it? What is it? How do you know——"

"I got into the cave for a minute while the men were out," I explained. And in a few words I related my adventure.

I thought he would have stove in my spine. He clapped me on the back like a housemaid beating a pillow.

"You damned plucky little devil!" he swore. "I wouldn't have done it myself."

"I'm quite sure you would and better," I coughed. "Let's get on. I can't be easy till we have the thing in safety."

They were all waiting for us outside the cave when we arrived. The sound of shots had been heard down on the beach. Lady Mary and Sapphira, in the light of our driftwood fire, looked anxious and pale-faced, as if they had been listening and wondering. Jim was seated comfortably on a flat stone, eating coconut. I do not think he was very fond of it, but he said it passed the time.

"I reckoned you'd get back all right," he observed comfortably, shifting a junk of nut from one cheek to the other.

But when he heard about the box, he was as much excited as anyone. I handed it over to Lady Mary; we all went into the cave, and Jim lit up, with prodigal display, almost the whole of our stock of candlenut torches. We crowded round the Sea-Lady. Of course we should have looked away, and pretended not to take any undue interest in her private property, but we simply couldn't do it.

"It's locked," said Jim.

"It's been broken open," said Flower. He was right; the lock closed, but did not catch. The box, now I saw it in full light, was a beautiful thing; deepest violet Russia leather, with handles, lock and name plate of engraved brass. On the plate all eyes were instantly fixed.

I cannot hope to tell you how disappointed we were when we saw that it was engraved with a Christian name alone. "Alix," cut evidently in facsimile of a written signature.

"Is that your name?" asked Flower of the Sea-Lady. She held the box in her hands, looking curiously at the plate.

"I don't know," she said presently, raising her head. "You call me Lady Mary."

"Alix," said Flower. "Alix. Does that recall anything to you?"

She stood looking at him, her lips a little apart, the delicate line of her eyebrows seeming to waver. I do not think for an instant he knew, but he had spoken her name in the accent of a lover. It seemed to me that she was listening, not to what he said, but to that tone.

"Alix," he said again.

She shook her head.

"Lady Mary," put in Jim, "if you don't open that box soon, some of us are just going to curl up and die of suppressed curiosity."

"You suppress it a lot, don't you?" commented Sapphira.

"I'm not sure that it is mine," said the Sea-Lady, "I can't remember. . . ." And the old distressed expression, that we had not seen for long, came clouding over her face again.

"Better open it and see," counselled Flower.

The Sea-Lady, obeying him, as she always did, put the box in his hands, the while she manipulated the lid. It seemed to me, and I daresay to the rest, that her fingers moved as if they were familiar with their ground. In a few seconds she had loosed the lid, and the dressing-case was open.

It was a wreck.

There had been bottles, jars, toilet appliances of all kinds fitted into it, as one could see by the numberless morocco loops, differently sized and shaped. There was still a writing-case, delicately tooled, but devoid of pencils and pens. There was a beautiful small jewel-case, removable, but fastened in with catches. It had been roughly dragged open, and the velvet linings were torn loose, apparently in search for some secret recess. It was empty. The case had been most thoroughly looted.

"That's been silver fittings it had—likely solid," said Sapphira relishingly. "The brutes has ripped loose every bit of metal."

"Not every bit," said Jim, who had taken the case up, and was turning it slowly over. "They missed this." He laid his finger on the name plate, which we

had supposed to be engraved brass. "That's gold," said the miner. "And the handles."

"Then," I suggested, "the fittings must certainly have been gold too. No wonder they looted it."

"Gold!" said Sapphira, almost smacking her lips. "That's doing it proper, that is. But I might have known it. When she was thrown ashore her little shimmy," went on Sapphira narratively, "was like a spider's web trimmed with the frost off of a window-pane."

I felt grateful to Jim for foregoing the mischievous comment that I saw twinkling in his eye.

"Here," said Flower, somewhat hurriedly, "give it back till I have another look. May I hunt right through it, Lady Mary?"

"Oh, please do," she said. She was not nearly so much interested as the rest of us were; the question of her own identity did not seem to sit very heavily on her mind. But she watched with attention while the big man's big, dexterous fingers felt all over the case, inside and outside, to ascertain whether anything of interest, value, or significance had been left behind by the robbers.

I did not expect that anything would come of the search, but Flower was determined to have the last secrets out of the box, and his efforts did not go unrewarded. A flat morocco letter-case came to light.

"Now we have it," said the surveyor in a satisfied tone. "This is certainly some of your property." And he handed the case, unopened, to the Sea-Lady.

She drew out of it a simple letter, written on foreign paper. I saw her turn it over, but not a gleam of expression came into her face.

"I do not think it is mine," she said. "Will you read it?"

"Aloud?" said Flower.

"Why not?" she answered him.

He looked at her curiously, but opened out the letter. We were all standing round him; none of us had thought to sit down. The light from the candlenut torches, smoky and glaring, fell on the ring of interested faces, of which the calmest and least interested was certainly that of the Sea-Lady.

Flower read—

"G—— Club, Piccadilly.

"My Darling Alix,

"I have written to you already by this mail—though indeed I scarcely expect my letter will catch you up, on your flying journey. I am writing again, not because there is anything special I have to say, but because I must repeat just once more how I love you, and how sweet you looked that day down at Liverpool, when I saw you off by the ever to be cursed *Caronia*. Alix, Alix, Alix, get quite well soon, and come back quickly. You are rich in unspent years, but I am so poor that I grudge every day you spend away.

"I saw H. M. the other day. She was most gracious, and asked me to send you her kindest regards. She tells me that it is a poor return I make for favour, in taking away the best of all her maids, and I can only agree with her, but man is selfish. Dear, you should have heard how she spoke of that other Maid; it seems more like twenty days than over twenty years, she said, since Margaret left her. 'I shall not easily forget her,' she said, 'but your little Alix is sweeter.' She looked at me as if she would have said much; H.M. forgets nothing, and you, of all people, don't need to be told what her lovely tactfulness can be.

"Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself—I grudge you

nothing, though I wish it could have been shared by me. Tell Lady Grace to guard my jewel, I almost fear to let it go so far from my safe keeping. I came up to town yesterday; the Court looked so lovely I was loth to leave it behind. They are working hard at the Dutch garden, and I hope it may be worthy of its mistress. I got Adams mantelpiece, it will replace that Jacobean one that was damaged. Queen Elizabeth's bedroom is being cannily treated, but some of that panelling has simply got to come down and be replaced. I agree with you about the engravings; they are banished to the housekeeper's room. For all I can do to the place, for all the many people it harbours, the Court looks empty and sad. It waits, like its owner.

"Good-night, Alix, sweet Alix, so like your god-mother. I pray the Seven Seas may treat you ever kindly, and carry you back safe to old England. 'And your petitioner will ever pray'—

"Always yours only,
"C DE C."

There was silence in the cave, after the reading of the paper. Flower folded up the sheet, put it back into the violet morocco case, and handed it to the Sea-Lady without a word. I did not dare to look at his face.

The pause was broken by Sapphira.

"Well, if that's not a nice love-letter—and do you know anything about them people, dearie?"

"I do not know," answered the Sea-Lady. There was struggle, almost pain, visible on her face.

"It's written to some girl in service in a big house, who's gone travelling with her mistress, I reckon. They say things about a maid, and taking her away. I'd guess the chap who wrote it was the steward or bailiff or something of the place they call the Court; he seems to have a lot to do with the repairs. . . . Well, it's an

interesting letter, but it don't tell us much, does it, dearie? and how do you think you ever got it in that dressing-case of yours? Was it your maid that it was written to?"

The Sea-Lady was silent; I doubt if she heard a word.

I wondered that Flower, who had been so keen on helping her to recover her memory, had nothing now to say. It seemed a matter of no moment to him—to judge by his demeanour—whether the Sea-Lady ever recovered her memory again or not. And yet this was far and away the best and biggest chance that had ever presented itself of lifting up the dark curtain that heretofore had covered all her past. Could he not even ask her a question or two? I fancied that memory must be very near to dawning in her mind. Of course, I did not take Sapphira's view of the letter. I guessed, more accurately than anyone else in that place was likely to do, the full astonishing significance it bore. But what use was that, or anything else, as long as the Sea-Lady could not remember?

And still Flower was silent.

It was Jim who spoke.

"What about turning in? I've got first watch, and I want to get it over."

"Give it to me," said Flower, speaking for the first time since he had handed the letter back to the Sea-Lady. "I don't feel sleepy. I'll look out now, and you can have the middle watch."

Sapphira and the Sea Lady went into their cave. Flower, the handyman, had made them a partition of woven palm-leaves, with a sort of swinging flap for a door, so that they enjoyed complete privacy. Jim dropped down on his bed of bracken and coconut canvas, flung

his arms above his head, and sank instantly to sleep. I lay down near the doorway; it was a warmish night, and I wanted to feel the breeze on my face, and look at the stars as I lay. Old tropic wanderers will want to know what we were doing about mosquito nets; there is no sleeping in hot countries without them. I can answer that we were very well off in that particular. The ever useful coconut canvas, open in texture, and capable of being split to different thicknesses, had been sewn into nets that did all that was required. But Ku-Ku's Island was not much troubled with mosquitoes, and often enough we did not lower the nets till near morning.

I lay, then, with my face to the open sky, waiting for the sleep that I knew would be long in coming. On me, and me alone, of the company, the weight of a great secret had descended. I knew about Lady Mary.

Her name, it is true, I did not yet know. But a single telegram sent to any centre of civilisation when—or if—we got away from the island, would bring all the information that we could desire. I knew where the telegram should be sent; I knew to whom it should be directed. I knew that Lady Mary, whatever she was, was not Lady Mary; Lady she might be, probably was, but her real name was Alexandra, and she had been named after the greatest lady in the land, and the loveliest in the world, whose goddaughter and Maid she was.

No wonder that I had thought I remembered that still, self-possessed way she had of standing with her hands before her—I had seen its like on the platform of a hundred public functions, in England. No wonder that a likeness to the world's loveliest lady had haunted me, unknown to myself, when I looked at our Sea-

Maiden. It is well known to certain sets of Society—of which sets I once was an outer, unconsidered member—that those in constant and immediate contact with the very great often acquire an amazing resemblance to them. And the features of Lady Mary—the very large eyes with a beautiful fulness underneath; the oval chin; the long neck, and sweet, close-set mouth—were the best possible foundation for such an acquired likeness to grow upon.

What was the fascination of the Sea-Lady? What was, and is, the fascination of the "Sea-King's daughter" whom she served? There are no words to tell. But the heart of an Empire in one case, and the hearts of us poor, comparatively humble men in the other, leaped their own reply. . . .

I could not rest, even with the quiet stars to calm me. I turned again and again, looked to the darkness of the cave, with the face of Rocky Jim showing as a dim white blur; to the beach, moon-silvered, with the wild bananas swinging their vanes, like great dark snatching hands, across Orion's jewelled belt and sword. I heard the upward crash and downward suck of wave after wave on the island walls outside; I heard the sinister hum of the reefs away at sea, like the call of a myriad giant hornets. The moon climbed up and up among the white stems of the palm trees; the bell-bird ceased its tinkling in the forest; the ghost-pigeon, that wails in deep night, when all true pigeons are asleep, and that lures—so Papuans say—the wanderer into dark places of the bush, where he loses sight and dies, took up its melancholy crying. And still I could not sleep.

I thought that Flower's watch must be almost over. I got up and walked barefoot over the cold sand; there

was no use lying awake like this, when I could have a companion to relieve my loneliness. But I could not see the surveyor.

I supposed he had gone up to the top of the island to look about him, and make sure that no more trouble need be expected from the Greeks. I found a quiet seat among the rocks—my strained foot was giving some slight trouble—and settled myself to wait.

In a minute or two I saw him, coming up from the edge of the sea. His hands and hair were dripping; he had evidently been bathing his head to cool himself. I was about to speak to him, when I caught sight of his face in the full moonlight, and saw that upon it which closed my lips. . . .

. . . "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." It was Sterne who said that, and he ought to have known, for, with all his genius, he was weak to stand against the winds of life. I think God does so temper the cruellest of all winds for us who are shorn of the strength and splendours of other men. I suffered, bitterly, in Ceylon, when the girl I loved with a young man's first passion was taken from me. I had suffered since that day, when the Sea-Lady first stepped dripping and sparkling out of the ocean into our lives, with the knowledge that she was not, could never be for me. But the hell that I saw in Flower's face when, thinking himself alone with the night and his agony, he looked up to the unpitying skies, and stretched his great arms abroad, and beat and wrung his hands, was as far from me as the heaven that he had hoped for was for ever out of my reach.

I felt shamed to my soul to have spied upon his

agony. I knew, now, why he had not spoken; why he had wanted the first watch of the night so that he might be alone to wrestle with the blow that had fallen on him. I knew that he had never taken the ring the Sea-Lady wore, and the few unconscious references to "Cedric," very seriously; that he had hoped, and that he had loved, as few men in the world can love, with all the great heart and soul enshrined in his great body. I had, in the days that passed, heard something of the history of his first marriage. It was a sad and a heroic tale. He had married a woman who drank; the trouble had developed during their engagement, and Flower had insisted on carrying out his promise, in the hope of saving her. He had not saved her; after a struggle that lasted for long and bitter years, she had died—of drink—leaving him defeated, free, and so weary with the fight that he had never, since her death, cared to give any woman a second glance, until Lady Mary came, and—as he did not tell me, and as I knew—took him captive with the first look of her innocent, lovely eyes, for as long as life should last.

Yes, he had hoped. And this was the end. No one, reading that letter, could have mistaken the fact that it was written by a lover to the woman who had given him her promise, and upon whom he relied as he relied on God or Heaven. I could not understand all of it myself, but so much was clear. Clear, also, was that other dizzying truth that I thought Flower had not even perceived—that placed our little Sea-Lady, by right, within the range of the "fierce light that beats upon a throne." . . .

If I had ever thought of pointing out to him this additional barrier, I lost all idea of it now. Best keep

out on the beach, collecting the fine white wood-ash that was our only soap (and very good soap it is), running fresh water into the breaker, and scrubbing down with a wisp of coconut fibre; dressing again, as much as any of us dressed, and getting away to collect a bit more firewood for Sapphira, or to fish off the outer wall of the island, or to look for wild peppers for the inevitable stew. He would eat hurriedly, and get away again before the rest of us had finished; a hundred tasks he had found, or made, seemed to be always waiting for him. He had undertaken a geological survey of the whole island, and used to spend hour after hour, under the fiercest midday suns, with a smoothed-down slab of wood, and a rough charcoal pencil, drawing and making notes, tapping strata with a makeshift hammer of rock, and breaking specimens away; peering into chasms and over "faults" that showed on the high edges of the cliffs. . . . He would hunt unweariedly through and through the bush for anything animal, vegetable, or mineral that might be of use to our little community of castaways. He would try, undaunted by failure after failure, to catch some one of the Greeks outside their fortified cave, daytime or night-time, and make him prisoner. "If we could only get hold of one of the brutes, and make him listen to reason," he said, "one might arrive at some understanding about the ownership of the place." But no such opportunity presented itself.

He would cut down mulberry trees with his knife, working hard for hours to fell one or two of the slim trunks, and rip them open, and collect the inner bark, driving Jim and myself, his helpers, as if we were all in danger of imprisonment or torture, if we did not produce

a certain tale of work by a certain hour. And he got flat logs and set them out of the sun in a cool part of the beach, and made wooden beaters, and set everyone to beating tappa cloth out of the fibres. And when we were all tired, or had gone off to other jobs, he would sit there still, a strange figure, loose wild hair standing up all over his head, torn shirt hanging off his neck, hands, each with a beater tight held, working up and down like parts of some machine—tap-tap, tap-tap till sunset; he never rested. He never stopped to yarn with any of us, or to have a quiet smoke—he smoked as he worked, and spoke only when it was necessary.

And he kept away from the Sea-Lady.

I do not say that he avoided her when there was a chance of doing anything for her or for Sapphira. But he made no occasions to seek her company. He peeled candlenut torches, so that she should have the light she fancied of nights in her sleeping cave, and in silence left them where she could find them. He plaited her a new wide hat, almost as big as an umbrella, out of palm-leaves, and handed it to her without a word, leaving barely time for thanks, before he turned away into the bush again. Often, in the night, when it was Jim's watch or mine, we might see Flower's great shaggy head lifted up from his bracken bed, and peering from the doorway of the cave; or one of us patrolling about the slope might suddenly come upon him, loping down, with that deerhound stride of his, from the plateau, whither he had gone to make an unexpected visit. He seemed to trust no one but himself to keep guard over the Sea-Lady.

Jim and I, talking things over, agreed that he was taking the Greeks almost too seriously. After all, we

argued, things could not go on like this for ever. We had been near three weeks on the island, and in all that time the men of the cave had never—to our knowledge—been out in daylight. If they came out at night it was with the utmost caution, using the man who could see as a sentry, so that they could get back in a hurry, should any one of us come along. They would certainly get tired of this sort of thing. They would run up some kind of a flag of truce—appeal to us in some way—try to make terms. So Jim and I argued.

Flower used to listen to us, if he were present, in utter silence. He was not much of a talker at the best of times, but this want of responsiveness on his part had a chilling effect.

"Don't you agree with us?" I asked him once. It was the time of the evening meal. We were sitting inside the cave, our log stools placed about a table that we men had managed to knock up out of the natural planks found buttressing the roots of certain great Papuan trees. We were careful with our ship provisions nowadays; lemon-grass tea smoked in our tins; fish from the lagoon were served on platters of banana leaf, white coconut cream, with red peppers cut up in it, stood in a coconut shell at everyone's elbow, to dip the morsels in, since we had no sauce. We had a single precious biscuit apiece; and Sapphira had stewed a mess of miscellaneous fruits in a couple of ox-tongue tins, and served it for a sweet course. Despite the absence of the story-book breadfruits and yams and oranges and bananas, which are never found on true "desolate islands," we thought that Ku-Ku's Island was doing us none too badly.

Flower dipped a piece of parrot-fish in the coconut sauce, and ate it, before he made reply.

"No," was all he said.

"Why not?" Jim and I demanded together.

"Because," said Flower, setting down his emptied tin (I knew he missed the "real" tea worse than anyone else in the party, but he would not touch the remainder of our little store, preferring to leave it for use in possible sickness) "you've forgotten their point of view."

"They haven't got any," said Jim. "They're half-castes—or quarter at the best. You can't reckon on them as you would on white men."

"You can reckon on human nature, be it black or white," declared Flower. "For some time past, those men have been saying to each other, just as we have, that this state of affairs can't continue. They probably expected their boat long ago. I daresay the blow that did for poor Carl may have accounted for her too, if one only knew. Well, they must be beginning to see that. They are asking themselves, 'How is it to end?' And you may be sure that they will find some answer before we shall. Because if things are unpleasant for us, they are just about twiee as unpleasant for them. We haven't committed two murders that would hang us, at Port Moresby. We aren't trying to 'skin' the island of its shell and shell-money—which I suppose they have hidden away before someone else discovers it—our game is to apply decently to the Lands Office for a lease. We aren't shut up all day; we haven't, so far, gone blind, any of us. Oh, the light end of the stick is ours, without doubt. That's why I say that they will make the first move."

"What do you think it will be?" asked Lady Mary.

The light in his eyes as he turned to her! the bitter longing beaten down by his will as a man beats a fire back into the ashes from which it has burst forth. . . .

"I can't tell you that," he said, with the gentleness that his voice always held when he spoke to her—which was hardly ever now. I wondered if she saw the double meaning that I could not help reading into the words.

I do not think she did. Sitting there on her rough log stool, her much-washed and mended cotton dress falling over her Dian-shape like the draperies of some fair statue, a blood-coloured hibiscus burning in her hair (why had she placed it there?), the Sea-Lady, I knew, was thinking hardly at all of anything Flower might say. She was thinking of him; looking at him; wondering, grieving over him. She had spoken only to make him speak to her.

Did she love him, then? It was impossible to tell. That supreme self-control of hers, like clear ice about a flower, showed, yet protected, the beauty of her heart and mind. One saw—one suspected the sweetness of that which lay within, but one could not scent, could not touch the lovely thing. The Sea-Lady's secrets were her own.

Yet I thought that the shadow which rested on the face of the big surveyor, in these latter days, threw some portion of its shade on her.

But he had not done speaking. He held out his tin to Sapphira, for more of the lemon-grass tea, swallowed it, as if to clear his voice, which seemed less under control than usual—perhaps he had caught some cold wandering about the island—and went on—with a change of subject that seemed curiously abrupt,

"I want to do some hunting to-morrow."

"What are you going to hunt?" demanded Sapphira, alert at the mention of anything that might concern the kitchen.

"Pigs," said Flower.

We who walk somewhat apart from the rest of humanity have strange intuitions at times. I cannot say why, but at that moment I felt an unreasoned conviction that Flower had not changed his subject so much after all. I was sure the pigs had something to do with it.

"I thought there wasn't any," objected Sapphira.

"There are a very few. I've found traces lately. I think we could manage to trap some in that stretch of big scrub."

"Why aren't there more?" demanded Jim. "This ought to be a mighty good place for them, judging by other islands."

"I should suppose," said Flower, choosing his words with some care, and looking only at the piece of fish he was eating, "that the island, for some reason or other, does not suit them."

"Where do you reckon they came from?"

"Ku-Ku probably brought them."

"Isn't there food for them here?"

"Plenty."

The conversation seemed to languish. Supper finished without much more talk. Afterwards, Jim went up to do sentry while the rest of us enjoyed a quiet lounge on the beach, in the cool of the twilight.

Every man has his faults, and I am no exception. The worst of mine, or one of the worst, I fear, is curiosity. I can't mind my own business, exclusively. I must know what the rest of my immediate world is thinking, feeling, fearing. Especially I must hunt down a secret when I suspect one. If this is a meanness, it has at all

events never led me into mean conduct. I play fair. I don't trap. I ask. . . .

That night, I was hot on the trail of a mystery. What had Flower meant? What was the inner significance of his talk about pigs? I knew it was waste of time for me to question him, the big man was not the sort of person with whom one could take a liberty—unless . . .

Yes, that was the way. If the Sea-Lady asked him he might or might not tell, but he would not at all events be angered.

"Lady Mary," I whispered.

She turned her head in the twilight. We were sitting on the outer rim of the little group.

"Can you slip aside to speak to me?" I said softly. "Something about Flower."

She did not appear to hear; she made no answer—but she rose by and by, and changed her seat. We could talk now without being overheard.

I told her, in a few words, that I thought there was something behind the hunting plan, and begged her to try and find out. She nodded, and by and by went back to her place.

"Mr. Flower!" I heard her say. He started just a little, as a horse starts when a spur touches it. He turned his head to look at her; he had been looking darkly through the gathering darkness, out to the prisoning sea.

"What are you going to hunt pigs for?"

"For you to eat," he answered.

"Is that all?"

"No, Lady Mary." We knew now that her name was not Lady Mary—but it had become a habit to use it.

And she herself laid no claim to the other. "It may be mine," was all we could get her to say.

"Am I not to know?" I would have given her all that she asked even to the half of my kingdom, had I been a king and she a slave who asked in such a tone. Flower felt it—even more than I, perhaps.

"You shall know, if you wish; but it might be better not to trouble you," he answered.

"I think I would rather be troubled," she said. And through that hateful clairvoyance of mine, that always told me everything which was likely to pain me, I knew she was asking and persisting, not because I had set her on, but because she wanted to be assured that no special danger to Flower lurked in this new enterprise, whatever it might be.

"Well," he answered her after a pause, "I can tell you what I want them for, if you wish; I want them partly for food, and partly for experiments."

"Experiments?" Her voice showed dismay, almost horror. "You were a doctor—do you mean—oh!"

"I was a medical student," he corrected. "And I don't mean vivisection. My experiments, if I make any, will not be in any way troublesome to the pigs."

There was a note of finality in his voice that seemed to tell her she had asked enough. Yet she ventured one more question.

"Why do you want pigs, in especial?"

"Because, in some ways, they resemble human beings."

She asked no more. I could have put a question or two on my own account, but Lady Mary, once satisfied that no danger to Flower was involved, left the subject alone. I do not know if further asking would have

brought further replies. He had gone very far out of his usual road in answering even so much.

The pig-hunt took place next day. It resulted in the capture of three small pigs, which was all to the good ; but they were—we thought—rather dearly paid for by the expenditure of one of our cherished cartridges, which Jim was obliged to fire off in the face of a big boar that charged him, tusks bared and champing, in a narrow forest track. He stopped the boar, but it left us with just one cartridge for all possible emergencies.

" I wonder was I worth it," he speculated aloud, as we filed out again, in the later afternoon, carrying our trophies. I had filled the rather ignominious part of a mere beater, but anything was better than giving no help. Sapphira and Lady Mary had been safely blocked into the cave with big stones before we left ; and in any case we had the Greeks' cave practically in sight most of the time ; so it had been possible for all three to join the hunt together.

" Yes, you were," answered Flower calmly, as one taking his part in a serious discussion. " If I hadn't thought an extra man worth saving, I wouldn't have brought the revolver with us. Of course there was always the chance of a boar charging. It would have ripped you up, and made you useless, if it didn't kill you, and we can't afford useless people."

His words were to bear a bitter meaning before long ; but none of us knew that then.

He had captured the baby pigs alive, and slain the old boar. The sow we had not seen. It seemed odd that she was not about. The piglets, though past the age when they would have depended solely on her, looked as if they had suffered somewhat for the want of

maternal care; they were thin and poor looking, and there were but four in the litter—the three we caught, and one that got away.

"Something must have happened to the old pig," said Jim.

"Something must," agreed the surveyor.

I do not know if I mentioned that the coconut trees on the beach were all young ones, and that the tall old trees in full fruit were situated on the top of the island; but that was the case. We used a lot of coconut in our food; it was our only source of fat. Every day someone had to go up to the top, and bring down a few nuts from the windfalls, before Sapphira began her serious cooking. It was my job next morning. I went up as usual, found everything, as usual, tranquil, gathered my tale of nuts from under the biggest tree, and was turning home, when I noticed something odd. It was a mere nothing, but our nerves were all more or less overstrung in those days, and I stopped to investigate closely the glittering thing I had seen.

A button, nothing more—a trouser button with the edge worn bright, and glistening in the sun where it had fallen.

I picked it up, and brought it down to the beach with my load of coconuts. I was in two minds as to saying anything about it, but the smallest subject of conversation was a boon to us in those narrowed quarters, and I thought someone might have a word or two of comment. I showed it to the whole party, and we all had a good look at it, and decided that it was just a common trouser button of British make, imported into Australia for the finishing off of cheap cotton goods designed for the Pacific Islands trade. Also that the Greeks evidently

had not provided themselves with needles and thread.

Then we dispersed to our various tasks, for there was always plenty of work to do. Sapphira had fish to prepare for dinner; Lady Mary was busy with a tappa-cloth dress; Jim had to open and split up the coconuts that were wanted for cooking purposes, and to husk neatly the dozen or so that we always kept ready for drinking. I purposed to go and get bait off the rocks, and in the small pools of the reef, for fishing later on. I don't know what Flower had planned out; but whatever it was, he seemed to have altered his plans, for, after standing for a minute or two in deep thought, he bent down, picked up a few coconuts, and carried them to where Jim had already begun work with his sharpened stick planted firmly in the ground.

"Come with me, Ireland," he said to me. "Bring the rest of the nuts."

I gathered them up.

"Is that every one? Don't leave any."

"Every one," I assured him, wondering what was up.

"I may be wrong," said Flower, half to himself, as we walked over to Jim with our load, "but there's no use taking chances."

Jim was at work on the young drinking nuts, stripping the coat of fibres off, and converting the great lumps of smooth-skinned green, as big as a child's head, into globes of rough-tooled ivory.

"Hold on a minute," said Flower. He took the nut Jim was holding, and looked at it closely.

"Show me the rest," he said. One by one he went over the pile of drinking nuts, examining them minutely, especially about the point, where the two "eyes" of

the coconut—the soft spots one opens for drinking purposes—are to be found.

I began to see light. I remembered that Flower's first job in New Guinea had been the surveying of a site for a magistrate's residence, in the Trobriand Islands. I recalled what I had heard about the Trobriands—these, or others—it mattered little. . . .

There is only one place in the world—that I know of—where drinking coconuts can be, and are, poisoned without opening them or leaving any visible trace. That place is the Trobriand group, where live the most accomplished native poisoners in all New Guinea.

I followed Flower's thought easy enough. But I did not agree with him, nevertheless; I was almost certain that continual thinking and worrying over one particular matter had induced a sort of monomania in his brain. It was surely absurd to trace poisoned coconuts to Trobriand pearling and that errant trouser button.

Flower seemed to follow my thought with considerable accuracy.

"It can do no harm to try," he remarked, somewhat drily. "We'll drink water for to-day—and, Todd, you might refrain from bringing Sapphira any coconuts for her cooking."

"And when she begins asking questions?" queried Jim.

"Tell her the truth, but don't tell it till you need. That's a good all-round motto."

He was examining all the coconuts as he spoke, holding each one up, and searching all over its husk for marks.

"Found anything?" asked Jim.

"No. They know their work better than that, I fancy. There's only one way of finding out."

"What's that?"

For answer, he got up, and walked over to the pen of heaped-up stones we had made for the small pigs. He lifted a pigling out. It squealed and struggled wildly. And of course the women came running to see what was the matter.

Flower gave them a considering look.

"They've got to know," was his conclusion. And he made no remark when Sapphira, her hands spangled with silver fish-scales, and the Sea-Lady, rolling down her sleeves after some domestic task, came up to the pen, eager to know what was afoot. Lady Mary, I noticed, looked rather white. She was not quite easy as to Flower's intentions towards the pig.

It was to her that he turned, by and by, having taken out the pig he wanted, and tethered it by the hind leg to a tree.

"We are not going to hurt anything—if we can help it," he said, with that note of kindliness in his tone that would have reassured a member of the Anti-Vivisection Society. "We are only going to give this little piggy a drink of our own coconuts. If they disagree with him we shall be sorry, but we shall feel he's done a good work."

Lady Mary made no comment, but her eyes seemed to dilate as she watched the little pig greedily drinking coconut water, poured out in a giant clam shell. It took quite a lot, and afterwards ate the meat of one or two of our eating nuts.

"These are not so easy to poison, but one may as well be thorough," said Flower.

"Lord, is that what you're after?" asked Sapphira. "Are them brutes in the cave up to that game?"

"That is just what I am trying to find out," replied Flower.

Never was pig more carefully attended to than the little captive under the hibiscus tree, for the rest of that morning. He seemed quite well so far as we could see. Hour after hour passed in the carrying out of our various tasks. Every now and then a visit paid to the pig by anyone who happened to be in his neighbourhood, found him well and cheerful, though evidently desirous of being let loose to wander on the shore, and pick up a trifle of decayed fish, if such were to be had.

About twelve o'clock, when we had almost ceased to watch the pig prisoner, Rocky Jim had occasion to go down the beach after a tin of salt water. Coming back again, he halted by the hibiscus tree. In another moment his yell drew everyone round him.

"Piggy's got it in the neck! Piggy's going to wink out!" he cried.

The little creature, dark, hairy and spotted, as these wild pigs are, an odd spectacle at the best of times, was lying on its side, kicking violently. Its mouth was very wide open, and it choked and snorted in its efforts to catch breath. Its belly seemed swelled up. It squealed, at intervals, in a feeble, jerky way. By and by, as we watched it, it rolled over on its back, and stuck all its four small hoofs in the air. In that position it remained some time.

The Sea-Lady stood beside Sapphira watching; her hands were tightly clasped; her breast heaved.

"Poor little beastie! Oh, poor little thing!" she cried. "We've killed it."

We had. Even as we watched it, it stiffened suddenly, rolled over on its side again, and lay still.

Lady Mary took out her handkerchief, and patted at her eyes.

"It got up this morning so happy," she said piteously. "It wanted so to live. It didn't think it would be lying dead like this before noon. It'll never, never run in the forest again, or eat the things it liked so much to eat, or——"

Her voice was breaking.

"You ought to been a vegetarian, Lady Mary," said Sapphira. "Didn't you never eat a breaded lamb chop in your life? Lambs is much nicer little things than pigs. And you've eat pigeon pie—made out of little doves that sings. And as to veal——"

"Let her alone," said Flower.

"Well, if she seen them bleeding veal—and it all alive—she'd never——"

"Let her alone!" Even Sapphira quailed before the tone. It was another man who spoke to the Sea-Lady.

"Lady Mary, we had to find out, for all our sakes, if we ran any risk of poisoning. I know now we do, and I'll take care it is guarded against. As for your poor little pig, he has saved the whole party. If he hadn't died to-day you would have had him roasted to-morrow."

The girl looked up at him with wet eyes.

"Somehow, that sort of thing seems different," she said. "Perhaps only because one is accustomed to knowing it is so. I can't help feeling sorry for this little creature, because—it makes one feel—all the pain in the world . . ."

She was near tears again.

"Everyone gets that way at times," proffered Jim, who was busy, as usual, lighting his pipe. "It don't last."

Lady Mary was sitting on a rock. She seemed to be struggling hard for self-possession.

Then I saw Sapphira do a curious thing. She reached out to Jim, and inflicted a pinch on his arm so vicious that his teak-like face gave a sudden twitch. Without another word or sign, she turned her back, and marched off to the kitchen. Jim followed her with his eyes for a moment. Then a light seemed to strike him, and he went after. I became curious, and went also.

But when I got to the cave I saw only Sapphira, standing idle with her hands upon her hips, and Jim loafing beside her.

"Nice and cool in here," said Jim, cocking an eye at me.

Sapphira cast a glance outside. Flower and the Sea-Lady were not, from this point, in view.

"If he doesn't, he's a fool," said Sapphira oracularly.

"Doesn't what?" asked Jim, with such simplicity of manner that I was sure he knew the answer to his own question—whatever that might be.

"Ninny!—what does a man do when a girl's crying?" demanded Sapphira.

Jim leaned over her, and inspected her eyes with a medical air.

"*You're* crying, Sapphira," he pronounced (a brazen lie). And promptly he "did it."

Suddenly awakened, I made for the doorway.

"You stop," cried Sapphira. "Me and Jim, we don't mind you much; but Lady Mary will have a fit if you catch her letting impudent brutes take liberties." With a look at Jim that seemed to fasten the epithet on him rather than on Flower, "I'd ought to 'a' boxed your ears for that," she pronounced.

"I was hoping you would," confessed Jim shamelessly. "I enjoy it nearly as much as you do yourself."

"As I what?" The "what" was emphasised in a manner that echoed in the cavern roof.

"Do it again," said Jim, with one cheek reddened, and a wicked eye. Sapphira hesitated; even that indomitable woman knew when she had met with a foeman worthy of her steel.

"I won't," she said; and Jim's self-possession did not avail to hide a flash of disappointment.

"You would never have done it a third time," he said.

"Why?" demanded feminine curiosity.

But Jim had strolled out, hands in pockets, leaving her to consider the mystery in which he had departed.

I followed him into the white-gold sun of noon, on to the beach where corals lay scattered among pink and pearly shells, and yellow and scarlet blooms from the hibiscus trees.

The Sea-Lady was walking back towards our end of the beach, alone. I did not see Flower anywhere, but I saw by Lady Mary's face that Sapphira, wise with the wisdom of the pioneer woman, had guessed aright. The big surveyor had "done it."

I met him afterwards upon the top of the island, and it seemed to me in one of those odd bursts of comparison that strike one like a breeze from no one knows where, that he looked like a man who had stolen a crumb of holy bread from the altar to sate his earthly hunger, and by the sacrilege had but made its edge more bitterly keen. . . .

As for Lady Mary, she was busy beating tappa cloth on her wooden block, and no one now could see her face at all.

CHAPTER IX

RETRIBUTION

THE night was very dark. It was the time of the waning moon; not till hours later would her wearied, outworn orb lift face of tarnished silver from the rim of the reef-scarred sea, to light the palms, and the cottonwoods, and the pillared banyan trees on the plateau summit of Ku-Ku's Terrible Island.

There was not much wind. Now and again the immense banana leaves, swaying on their elastic stems, would strike one another with a sound like soft clapping of hands; or the palms, touched among their lofty crests by a flying breath of air that never reached the ground, would stir into sudden pattering like a squall of rain. Then the wind would pass, and the night, that had stirred and sighed in its sleep, would rest without sound once more.

We were all on the summit of the island, hidden behind immense weathered coral boulders, and trunks of solitary trees. Not only Flower, Rocky Jim and I were taking part in this midnight adventure; Lady Mary and Sapphira were there too. In a general council of war, we men had decided that the time had come to make another effort towards capturing, or obtaining speech with, the Greeks of the cave. The attempt at poisoning was the very last straw. From that time on we were resolved to have no mercy.

Flower had made the plans. That afternoon, the Greeks' cave being as usual tightly closed, and fortified with the ingenious bottle-alarm that I have spoken of before, we had gone up on the plateau and cleared a small path parallel to the track worn through the grass scrub by the feet of the men of the cave. We made it run right out to the end of the island, which was not very far away. The cave track didn't go quite so far; it petered out inconclusively among the lalang-grass some way past the cave mouth. But our track was destined for different uses; it was to enable us to move quietly, unencumbered by rustling grasses, if we wanted to follow, or to avoid, the horrible, pistol-armed chief players in this ugly game of blind-man's-buff. So we carried it as far as seemed necessary.

What we hoped was that one of us—perhaps Jim, the crack marksman, who carried our only Colt and solitary cartridge—would succeed in doing for the man who was really dangerous; the one who at night time could see; and that after that we might surround and capture the remaining four. Flower and I had armed ourselves with stone clubs made New Guinea fashion, out of a lump of rock strongly laced on to a heavy stick. We had also filled our pockets—or what remained of them—with stones as big as could be made to go in. A well-pitched stone is a weapon not to be despised.

Then when we had the whole thing settled, it was all upset again by Sapphira. She said she would come too.

Flower said he wouldn't have her.

"And how are you going to stop me?" demanded the pioneer heroine, hands on her massive hips, eyes flaming. "You that's been a married man, how do you stop a woman doing what she's a mind to do? You that's

nothing more than a new chum in the country, how do you know what the white women of New Guinea can do or can't? Give me one of them waddys of yours"—helping herself to a formidable stone club, and giving it a skilful whirl about her head—"and see whether I'm as good as a man or not, if it comes to scrapping. Look at that." She rolled up her sleeve, and clinched a biceps that a Clyde engineer might have envied—"look in my eye." She opened her eyes till they blazed into his. "Am I fit to help you, that's got only a man and a half to your back, or am I not?"

"It's not a question of that, Sapphira," said the big man kindly. "It's a question of whether we men are going to let women fight for us. And you know, if you came, Lady Mary couldn't be left all alone."

"Who are you calling a woman?" demanded Sapphira. "And as to Lady Mary, I reckon she'll be as safe somewhere up on the top as she'd be down on the beach. . . . Isn't there holes in the rocks there as well as here? Percival Flower, as sure as your mother named you like what you aren't, which is a born fool, I'm coming."

Flower abandoned her for a moment to appeal to Jim.

"Can you do anything with this wild woman, Todd?" he asked.

And Jim answered coolly, "I reckon I could, but I reckon I won't. It is true what she says. She's as good as another man, if it comes to a row."

"You reckon you could, do you?" was all Sapphira's comment.

"Oh yes," answered Jim calmly.

"Do you mind saying how?" inquired Sapphira, with bitter sarcasm. "It might be of use to this

gentleman who knows everything, next time he thinks of getting married."

"I could do it," said Jim, "without saying a word, or laying a finger on you."

Sapphira seemed to be boiling up, like a kettle. There was no escape of steam as yet, no bubbling, but a slow steady rise of tension and temperature.

"I'll bet you what you like you couldn't," she said, shivering.

"Go you for your biggest wedding-ring," replied Jim, the unperturbed. "Against my Yodda nugget." He had a swastika-shaped nugget on his watch-chain, which we all knew he prized superstitiously. Sapphira's wedding-rings—she wore all three—formed a notable collection on her third finger.

"Show me then!" The kettle had not yet boiled, but the contained steam was beginning to steal out. Sapphira's breath came quick.

"You walk to the end of the beach first," replied Jim. "I can't tell you if you don't."

Sapphira, looking out sharply for concealed snares, started down the beach, her back turned to the kitchen cave. Jim let her get some twenty yards away, and then picked up a long coir fibre rope we had made for dragging timber, and with the unerring eye and hand of the Australian cattleman, hurled it through the air. It caught Sapphira as neatly as possible about the waist, lapping her arms to her sides, and dropped her on the seaweed, in a helpless bundle.

In three bounds Jim was at her side.

In two swift movements of his hands he had loosed the rope again and lifted Sapphira courteously to her feet.

"Now, tell me how you could have come with us!" he demanded. "And did I lay a finger on you?"

Sapphira, standing erect again—rather more erect than usual—looked at him for a moment in perfect silence. Still in silence she drew a wedding-ring off her third finger, and handed it to Jim, who promptly put it on his own little finger.

"Call it even?" queried Jim agreeably.

"I will," said Sapphira, "if you'll tell me——"

"Tell you what?"

"What you meant the other day when you said that I wouldn't smack your head a third time, if I did it a second time. You was mighty confident about that."

"I'll tell you all right——"

"Well?"

"—Some day," concluded Jim, walking off. Sapphira, her nostrils dilating so that she suddenly and oddly reminded me of a rocking-horse, looked after him for a moment; then stooped down, picked up the stone club, and holding it under her arm, untwisted her hair. Still holding the club, she let the huge coil down to her knees swung it up again, and coiled it with vicious tightness. She took pins from some mysterious spot—I rather thought I saw her pull them right out of her breast—and reefed her skirts well up. It was sunset, and none of us was wearing a hat, but she produced a hat-pin from somewhere or other, and stuck it carefully in her belt dagger wise. Thus accoutred and prepared, she remarked briefly, "Come on."

And we all came.

The Sea-Lady, with the fine courage that was hers, accompanied the party as a matter of course.

"If you will just tell me exactly what to do when we

get up there," she said, " I will do it." Flower nodded. I don't know quite what had passed between them, on the memorable afternoon when the big man had dried her tears, but I did know that he avoided her, if possible, more than ever since, and now would scarcely ever address even the most necessary words to her.

We planted her in one of the many safe hiding-holes among the rocks, and Flower told her, briefly, but very emphatically, on no account to come out, or even put out her head, if any shooting was done. Then, taking our own positions, we all settled down to wait, as Flower and I had waited only a few nights earlier. But this was a different waiting. We were one and all determined that, by hook or by crook, it should be the last. The vile trick with the coconuts had had the effect that a certain thing called " frightfulness "—of which the world knew nothing in those days—had, later on, upon nations and people oppressed. It drove us to determined retaliation.

I pass over the hours of waiting. They were long, till the moon came up. We scarce expected the Greeks to come out before. Flower had arranged an ingenious signalling system of fine threads fastened from one to another of the watchers. If anyone saw anything, or fancied that another was asleep, he could give warning, or wake the delinquent, without making a sound. . . .

For a long time everything was still up on the plateau, under the cloudy stars. Then a small wind from far away began to stir, low down, among the leaves. It drew from the dark east, when the moon had not yet risen, and brought with it, among the palms and paw-paw flowers, cold scents of seaweed and sea. Stronger and stronger it drew, till I felt my uncut hair rise up and

flutter about my forehead, and heard the great bananas clap their hands together, in the swing of the streaming air-current. It was the wind that goes before the moon.

A gold spark burned on the blackness of the sea-line. A gold flame peered ; a gold fire sprang. Then, wan and tired, but splendid, the waning moon took air, as a diver takes the water, and sailed high into view.

There must have been some chink in the cave through which the captain of the Greeks—the one seeing, or semi-seeing man—could see when moonlight came. Almost immediately on the rise of the moon, a clinking of bottles became audible. The barrier was being let down.

In a minute they were out, all five of them—the man who could see leading the other shambling after. The moon was climbing up and up ; we saw that all five had their revolvers strapped in their belts, and that they kept their hands on the butts. Once out on the track, they all stood and listened, craning their heads this way and that, and staring, open-mouthed, with sightless eyes. . . .

A few minutes' watchfulness seemed to satisfy them that no one was about. They came forward, loosening hold of the revolver butts, and relaxing the tension of their strained bodies. The man who could see moved slowly but surely about. He seemed to be carrying their food.

It had been agreed that Flower was to give the signal for a general rush—a slight twitching of the thread, repeated three times. On the third pull we were all to rise and make for the Greeks, Jim, with our pistol, was to try and down the man who could see. The rest of us, not omitting the valiant Sapphira, would do our best

to "get" the blind but fully-armed men, before they "got" us. We had agreed that the chances of someone being shot were not small, but that even the loss of one, or more than one, of our number, was better than the wholesale slaughter of the party that was likely to come about sooner or later, now the Greeks had started the game of poisoning.

The plan was a fair one, and might have succeeded in the ordinary course of events. But that course was thrown from its orbit by nothing more dignified than the circumstances of a sneeze.

It was Lady Mary who sneezed. She told us, afterwards, that some of the wild peppers just about her hiding-hole had been bruised, and that they touched her nose, letting free their irritating juice upon the edge of her nostrils. She pressed her forefingers hard into the corners of her eyes, schoolgirl fashion, to keep back the impending disaster. But nothing would keep it back. She gasped, choked, choked again, and—sneezed!

The Greek who could see—I think his sight must have been exceptionally good that night—did not waste a single moment. Before any of us really understood what was happening, he had swung round, caught a gleam of a light dress somewhere in the shadows of the rocks, and, guided by the direction from which the sound had come, sprang upon the Sea-Lady. His hand was on the hilt of his knife even as he sprang. I think she had as little chance of escaping him as a lamb had of avoiding the leap of the tiger, before the white teeth sink home.

Jim, whose nerve never failed him—I frankly confess that I should never have dared to fire so close to the girl—threw his revolver into the air, and fired almost

instantly. But the Greek, coming sidewise, had seen his hand go up, and ducked. The bullet went over his head. I heard Flower's low groan, "Oh, my God!" as he leaped forward, too far away to be of any use. I saw Sapphira, who was nearest the Sea-Lady—as I was farthest—swing her waddy up in the air; it showed black, an instant, against the moon, and then it fell. And with it fell the Greek, uttering a cry. She delivered another blow as he dropped, but I do not think it could have been needed, nor could the mighty crash of Jim's stone club, as it came down a moment after. The Greek was ended.

I have often, since then, thought of what happened after, and tried to guess what would have been, had things turned out a very little differently. I think we should have knocked one or two of the Greeks successfully on the head, and that they would have "got" one or two of us. Or they might have defended themselves successfully, blind as they were, by that trick they had of standing back to back, and firing all together. Two dozen dum-dum'd forty-five calibre bullets, if they could have emptied their revolvers, would certainly have done some damage.

But it was, after all, the unexpected—the utterly unlooked for—that did happen. And our pathway was responsible.

I believe, since then, in New Guinea, we have been accused of doing the thing on purpose. It is false. Not one of us was capable of so mean a trick. We were willing to fight the Greeks, blind as they were, with all the stratagem of which we were masters, because their firearms gave them an immeasurable superiority—not to speak of their utter unscrupulousness and disregard

of human life. But the treachery of which some have chosen to accuse us was never ours. We made the track for our own use alone, without ulterior thought.

And now I must tell what happened; it is as well that that should be clearly understood.

When the leader dropped beneath Sapphira's waddy, Jim, Percival Flower and myself all sprang forward together, bent on attacking the other men before they had time to grasp the situation and shoot. I think we expected that they would bunch together, and start firing all round. It would have been the wisest course, from their point of view.

But we had not allowed for the panic into which they were thrown by the dying cry of their leader. There was that in it that could not be misunderstood, even by the blind. I think they knew at once that he was fatally struck. And, instead of grouping together, they spread out their hands, as a blind man does, and made for the shelter of the cave.

They had walked a hundred times along the track, and it was no doubt a familiar guide to their feet. They trusted themselves to it now, and ran. We weren't within fifty yards when we realised what was happening; we could not have caught them up even if we had wished—and after all, I do not know that we did wish. But who can tell what his desires may or may not have been, after a scene that has used every faculty, strained every passion, to its uttermost? In such a storm of the mind, the individual wave can leave no trace.

I can only record that the four blinded Greeks, thinking they took the path to safety and the cave, in reality set their feet on the path that led to neither. They blundered on to ours, followed it, yelling, in mad flight;

and before we could have stretched a hand to save any one of them, had passed the end of it, and gone staggering' and stopping too late, clutching wildly at one another, too late, screaming too late for the help that no man could give—over the cliff. . . .

For the space of some twenty seconds we stood still, staring blankly at the edge of the cliff. . . .

"Are they killed?" asked Sapphira, presently, of the island in general. Her mouth gaped open, black in the moonlight. Her wonderful hair had fallen; it dropped from waist to knee, a great rope frosted with silver, where in the daytime it was gold.

"Killed?" said Jim. "It's two hundred feet of a drop, and coral rocks like knives at the foot, and as many hundred fathom of water as you like just alongside. Waste of time to go and look."

But he went, nevertheless, and so did Sapphira and I. Flower stayed behind, with Lady Mary, who had come forth from her hiding-place, and was standing white, but apparently calm—she had a wonderful nerve, for the mere girl that she was—on the pathway, as far as she could get from the dead, still body of the Greek.

On the edge of the island the rising wind blew strong, whirling up from the face of the cliff, and bringing with it the damp, mossy, unforgettable smell of the coral reef. If you tell me that one cannot smell a reef, I will tell you that scores of island captains have saved their vessels on dark and misty nights, by the help of that very unmistakable, strange perfume. . . .

There was not even the trace of a body. The wretched men had rebounded, and fallen clean into the sea.

"Well," said Jim presently, in that agreeable drawl of his, "I don't see that there's any sense in stand-

weeping over the smash-up of four cows that we were trying as hard as we could to kill, anyhow. Whoever's sorry, I'm damned glad, and I don't care who knows it. Sapphira, what about a bit of supper and some of that vile der-rink I made ? "

I have not mentioned it before, but Jim had spent a day or two in manufacturing arrack out of palm sap. The process was simplicity itself, but the resulting liquor would have produced speedy delirium tremens in any constitution less hardy than that of Rocky Jim. Even Flower, who was no weakling in the matter of ordinary male tastes and habits, pronounced it " rather too stiff," and hardly touched it. But Jim said he found it good, and it seemed to have no appreciable effect upon his head.

To his inquiry, Sapphira made no reply. She stood unmoving on the top of the high cliff, her cotton skirts a-flutter in the upward-drawing draught. The moon was high above now. I could see that the pioneer woman's features were working with emotion. The demon that draws absurd analogies whispered in my ear that her face was like a pan of milk a-quiver before it boils. And it really was.

" Sapphira," said Jim, " a man cares for nothing but his stomach, no matter how many people are dying ; it's pig, pig, eat, eat with us, from morning till night. There's not one of us has an idea above what he puts into his face. And it's a blessing when we do get something to put into our faces, because it stops us talking nonsense, which otherwise we'd do as long as there was a drop of drink or a crumb of tobacco left in the whole world." He was filling a pipe as he spoke. " Come and give the pigs a feed, Sapphira."

But she was far from the mood that commonly urged her to the chastening of mankind; she seemed scarcely to hear what he said. She was looking out across the cruel stretch of reef-pricked sea, as it lay painted in smoke and ivory, underneath the moon. Her hands hung down by her sides; in one of them the waddy was still unconsciously grasped.

Jim took a step to her side, and saw her face.

"Are you performing over the smash-up of those blanky blank etcetera what is its?" he demanded. (Again I have taken the liberty of translating.)

"No!" screamed Sapphira.

"Then what, God bless your soul and mine, woman?"

Sapphira sat flat down on the grass, so suddenly that her heels projected over the edge of the cliff.

"I've killed a man," she said; swept up the edge of her petticoat, regardless of the two swelling limbs displayed, and wiped her eyes furiously. Then she replaced it, and let out a sob.

Jim sat down beside her. He regarded her with that wicked cock of the eye that generally preceded his mischievous feats or remarks.

"And that's the woman who got snake-headed when Flower said she *was* a woman, this evening," he observed. "What do you call yourself?"

Sapphira took no notice of him whatever.

"I killed him dead," she said. "I seen his head go pop."

"Well, didn't you want to?" asked Jim.

"Yes," she replied candidly, wiping her eyes again—with her sleeve this time.

"Then what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know."

"You'll be haunted with remorse all your days, Sapphira. You've taken away a life."

Sapphira to this made no reply. She had observed the remains of a tattered handkerchief in Jim's shirt pocket, and taken it out, as a matter of course. She was now engaged in blowing her nose. I have often wondered what the many weeping heroines of romance did when they had cried enough to come to this inevitable point. One never remembers that they used a handkerchief. Perhaps, knowing the disenchanting nature of the process, they fainted away in good time; weeping and fainting seem to have gone hand in hand, in the palmy days of Victorian love-tales. . . .

But Jim was made of less flimsy stuff than the Victorian hero. He merely told her to hang on to his wipe as long as she liked; she was welcome to it, though it was the only one he had—and continued his conversation.

"Sapphira, did you hear me when I said you'd taken a life, and would be followed by remorse all the rest of your days?"

"What's the use of rubbing of it in?" she demanded, with a slight return of her former fierceness.

"There's only one way of ever, ever putting it right."

"Well? I know you, Jim. You just want to be talking. Seems to do you as much good as blowing does a whale—I suppose it does do them good, or they wouldn't take the trouble, when no one want 'em to." Sapphira was evidently recovering.

"The one way," said Jim quite coolly, blowing a cloud of smoke from his newly-lighted pipe, and taking it out of his mouth to look at the stem—"is to replace him."

"My God, Jim Todd, do you think I can perform miracles?"

"I reckon you can," said Jim, and put his arm round her waist.

The light that must have broken on Sapphira at that moment broke on me too; I will swear I had not known what rocket Jim was going to explode. I got away, as in duty bound, and found, somewhat to my relief, that Flower and Lady Mary were walking off towards the cave, a good twenty yards separated from one another.

"Well, that's a blessing, anyhow," I thought. It seemed to me I had about as much as I wanted for one night.

It was a glorious supper that we enjoyed. Lady Mary was grave—she had come to the cavern shivering and pale, and Flower had made her drink a spoonful or two of Jim's arrack, exceedingly diluted, to bring the warmth and colour back to her face. But the rest of us were gay, and Sapphira had completely recovered, and was, if anything, rather harder on mankind than usual. She cooked us up an amazing meal, with double allowance of all the tinned delicacies we had been reserving for emergencies—("if this ain't an emergency, what is?" she asked, when Flower made some half-hearted objection)—and we ate with an appetite unknown to the island for long. A weight had been lifted from every mind. No more should we have to set guards at night. No more should we suspect poison in harmless fruits of the earth. No longer would it be necessary to walk warily about the plateau, looking every moment for sudden death to burst out upon us from some unseen lurking-hole of the Greeks. The island was ours now, the cave was ours, the whole Pacific Ocean, we felt, was ours. And any day a boat might come and rescue us. Why, there wasn't a thing to worry about.

It was dawn before we separated for the sleep we needed so much—the first really peaceful sleep that we had enjoyed since the loss of Carl and his schooner cast us away on the Terrible Island. Away to eastward, the reefs were turning red in the pure sunrise blue of the sea; small bright clouds, like flights of pink and golden parrots, were trooping up the sky. The dawn wind blew, the coconuts shook sparkling leaves to the new day.

"I feel," said the Sea-Lady, pausing at the entrance of her cave (how like a statue in a shrine she looked, against the dark arched background!) "as if all the bad luck were over now. I am sure we are going to be happy, and that there's nothing but good fortune ahead. I can feel it coming."

"You hadn't ought to say things like that," reproved Sapphira. "It brings bad luck. You'd ought to think them if you like, but not talk them right out. Everybody knows that."

"I'm sorry," said Lady Mary. "But somehow I feel happy."

"So do I," I supported. "I believe there's good luck ahead of us now, and I'm not going to 'sin my mercies' by denying it."

"You'd ought to go to bed," said Sapphira.

"We all ought to," said Jim. "We've been up all night, and I don't know what the rest of you feel, but my eyes are as tired as if they'd had sand thrown at them. I've just got to shut them up and sleep."

Flower looked at him; looked again—but said nothing. He seemed depressed.

"Kill-joy," I thought. "If things are not all sun with you, you might at least try to look pleasant."

We went to bed.

. . . . .

Of course no one could do any work, or settle anything next day, until the cave on the plateau had been thoroughly explored. Amid all the disturbances of the past few weeks, we had almost forgotten what had brought us in the first place to Ku-Ku's Island. But now the vision of riches began to take first place again. We stopped and stared at the bluish, ugly phosphate rock, wherever there was a scrap in sight; we wondered how many thousand tons there were of it, and just what it might be worth a ton. We argued amicably on the way up to the cave, as to where the red shell-beds might be situated; where Ku-Ku's living-place and workshop had been, in the years long ago; and I think we got thoroughly out of our depths—at least, I can answer for Sapphira, Lady Mary and myself—discussing the value of shell-money, and the effect of suddenly throwing a big find on the market.

Jim was not with us. He had declared himself too tired to rise. He said he thought he had a touch of fever, and would thank us to leave him the quinine and a tin of water, and go out and enjoy the picnic without him. So we went, leaving him alone in the cave—a course that may seem heartless to people who do not know New Guinea; but to those who do—if any ever read what I have written—will appear natural enough. "A touch of fever" is the commonest of ailments—in Papua.

We were very gay as we went up the glacis; very active and light-footed, inclined to hum bits of tunes, and to make friendly fun of one another. God knows there was material enough. We were a party of scarecrows—except for Lady Mary, who, with the innate good taste and fine sense of suitability that was part of her very self, had abandoned the worn and dirty remains of her

cotton dress, and made herself a robe of whitey-brown tappa cloth, somewhat after the fashion of the tabards one sees on the figures of court cards. Sapphira was a mass of patches, skilfully put on, considering the lack of proper sewing materials, but rather too picturesque. I had tied myself up here and there with string till I must have looked like a fowl prepared for roasting. Flower's khaki trousers, being made of tough material, showed no serious damage as yet, but his blue shirt hung open over his tanned neck and was cut off short below the elbows, and pieced on the shoulders with bits of greyish sackcloth. I don't know how Sapphira and the Sea-Lady had managed about the washing of their clothes; but they used to disappear now and again for some hours, and come back looking wonderfully fresh and neat. The rest of us simply went in bathing at the back of the island when we had a wash day, and stopped in the water till things were dry. . . .

The first set-back to our enthusiasm occurred when we reached the cave, and found it vilely dirty and ill-smelling. The Greeks were not, we knew, a cleanly crowd at the best of times; and, handicapped as they had been by their blindness, they had fairly surpassed themselves here. Nothing has been cleaned or cleared, no tins carried away, since they took possession of the cave—or so we judged. Sapphira and Flower for once agreed on the question of tidying-up, went vigorously to work, with what aid the Sea-Lady and myself could give, and in ten minutes or so we had the place cleared of its most offensive rubbish.

"They's ought to 'a' died of teutonic plague," pronounced Sapphira. "Or spotty typhus. I hope we don't catch anything."

"Lady Mary, we really don't want you; you'd better go outside till we've done," said Flower suddenly.

"Am I always to shirk everything?" asked the Sea-Lady.

"We don't know how these men went blind," said Flower gravely. "Until we do—Lady Mary, please oblige me."

She went to the doorway.

"You mustn't forget I am curious," she said. "Who knows what is in here? . . . May I come now?"

Flower cast a hasty glance about the cave. We had thrown away clothes that the men had left behind—they were very few—had slung out the stinking meat tins, and tossed the dirty blankets as far away as we could, upon the path.

"Yes," he pronounced. "Sapphira, have you the torches?"

She had. We lit them, and ventured, with a sense of agreeable excitement, into the Bluebeard's chambers that lay beyond.

"Well!" cried Sapphira. "My oath! Owen Ireland, did you ever see the like?"

"Yes," I told her; "in Egypt." For I had, when wandering up the Nile long ago, been shown many tombs, among the ruined cities of the desert, that were curiously like this rock chamber in the heart of the South Seas.

Behind the cave that the Greeks had used as a living-room, opened out several smaller and larger caves. I judged them to be natural in the main, with a little shaping from art. One of them was long and high, with a windy roof lit dimly from a rift. Laid down the middle was a big log, roughly squared into a sort of table, which

could only have been used by people squatting on the floor. And the floor, all round it, was polished glassy-smooth.

There was shell in here—the big white cockle-shell with the poppy-red lip, that is so highly prized in New Guinea. It lay in heaps upon the floor. It was scattered in chips and fragments about the log table. It had been cut into rounds, and smoothed, and half smoothed, and bored, and partly bored. And at one end of the table there was a heap—evidently collected by the Greeks—of completed shell-money: hundreds and hundreds of the bright red discs, bored in the centre, that the Papuan loves beyond all the white man's money. For traders, such as the Greeks were, it was a fortune.

Flower, standing with a candlenut torch in his hand, looked thoughtfully at the glowing pile of shell-money.

"But you know," he said, "it ought to have been more. There isn't such an enormous quantity here."

"That's right," agreed Sapphira. "They always did have it that Ku-Ku kept the place full up of slaves he had working for him, and there'd ought to be tons of it."

"Judging by the look of the floor," said the surveyor, there must have been a pretty extensive factory here. I see they used the old flint drill." He picked up a pointed stone from the floor. The bow and the twisted cord had vanished long ago, but the object itself was unmistakable.

"Then where is the rest of it?" asked the Sea-Lady. She seemed rather taken with the stuff, which indeed was pretty. She gathered it up in handfuls, and filled the rude bag-pockets of her tappa dress.

"I shall have such curious ornaments made with this," she said, "when we get away." Then, with a

momentary shadow flitting across her face, "If we get away."

"I judge," said Flower, "that the secret has not been such a secret after all. The canoe found by the Greeks proves it. Rely on it that a fair number of natives had some knowledge of the place, and came back and went as they liked."

"But why not all?" I asked.

"I think they didn't all know the real secret of this da—— this wretched island. I wish we did. It's clear that some of the natives understood very well how to avoid misfortune, when they came here. Still, that's a point to remember." He made a note of it on the bark tablet he carried. He had been filling it up with notes of matters that might bear on the problem of the Terrible Island, ever since we found the Greeks in the cave.

We had been enjoying ourselves up to this—the sense of newly-recovered freedom and safety, the pleasure of getting into the cave, and finding Ku-Ku's strange old prison-factory, had raised all our spirits. But now the shadow that brooded over the Terrible Island seemed to be falling again. We remembered that Sapphira had seen a man who had gone to the island, and returned blind for life; we recalled the fate of the Greeks. They had not found out the secret. Why should we flatter ourselves that we should? As likely as not, when the rescue ship came to the island—if it ever did—it would find us wandering about blind and all but helpless, half-starved, ragged, dirty—the mere ghosts of human beings. Whatever Ku-Ku's curse had been, it was still in full working order, and the chances were we should none of us escape it.

There were stone clubs in the cave, as well as shells

and shell-money, and these clubs are worth much gold. But we did not care to look at them. The cave had become suddenly oppressive; I think we all felt a longing for the open air and the sun. . . . Did we fear that a time might come, and that soon, when "the wind on the heath" would still be ours, but the sun no more? . . .

If we did, no one spoke of it. I said that the cave was stuffy, and Flower said there wasn't anything more to see, and Sapphira said we might as well get out of a place that was nothing but a dirty hole. And so we left it. And the light of our candlenut torches died away, and Ku-Ku's prison, long years silent and abandoned to dusky twilight and to bats, fell into stillness once more.

Once out into the fierce white sun of morning, and the wind among the grasses, we all recovered spirits.

"The find is certainly worth something," said Flower. "There should be a good many hundred pounds' worth of stuff all ready made, and a few tons of shell."

"It's twenty pounds a hundredweight in Samarai," I remarked.

"Because it's scarce," said Flower. "We must dribble it on the market. Same with the shell-money. But the real value of the island is that phosphate rock. It's getting scarcer the whole world over. The shell-money will come in nicely to pay expenses in taking up and disposing of the island. We might float a company . . ."

"If you do," observed Sapphira, who was striking on ahead, her dress kilted well up out of the way of the thorns and bush lawyer vines, "you won't have *me* in it. I don't believe in no companies."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," said Sapphira, "I've lived in New

Guinea twenty years, and I've learned what companies is. It's all the same if it's gold or osmiridium, or land for rubber, or coconuts, or hot springs in Ferguson, or cold storage in Port Moresby. You get something that's worth something, and instead of taking of it off into a corner to kai-kai by yourself with a few friends, as you'd ought to, you walks out on the road with it, and asks everyone you meet to take it away from you, and give you a bite of it just when they feel like. And they do. Only they don't give you no bite, for they don't never feel like it. And they cuts it up among their own friends. And you go back to wash gold for wages and nothing more, or boss niggers for somebody's manager. That's what companies is."

"What do you recommend?" asked Flower seriously. He had too much brain to pass over a bit of sensible advice simply because it came from an uneducated man or woman.

"You take up the island and sell it outright," said Sapphira. "Don't you go taking part cash and part paid-up shares. I know their tricks. The shares is paid up when you get them, but a bit afterwards they find there's more paying to do, and if you can't do it—which of course you can't, and they don't mean you to—out you goes. . . ."

"Can that possibly be true?" asked Lady Mary.

"I'm afraid it is," said Flower. "I've heard about that sort of thing. . . . You see, this is a very far-away place. But I don't particularly care what I get anyhow."

"Oh, why not?" She was walking beside him through the long grass; we were nearly at the top of the glacis. "I thought you were so keen on it. You

wanted—didn't you?—to have a yacht, and sail and sail and sail her all over the Pacific."

"I did," he answered; and I knew by his tone that there was more to be said, had I not been there. But I was just in front, and I could not go any faster than I was going already.

I heard her give a little fluttering sigh. We came up on the slope, out above the white beach where the yellow-belled hibiscus, and the red-rosetted hibiscus, and the pink beach convolvulus grew. We saw the opening of our cave. Jim was nowhere visible.

"Lazy beggar," said Flower. "He has been sleeping it out."

But as we came down to the beach, we saw that he was not sleeping. He was standing in the archway of the cave, a little back, so that the shadow fell on his face.

"You don't know what you've been missing, Jim," I cried. "We've found Ku-Ku's old factory, and all sorts of things."

"What have you been doing?" asked Flower.

"Smoking," said Jim. "It's not true what they say."

"What do they say?"

"About smoking. They say a man can't enjoy a smoke unless he can see."

"What's that to do with it?"

"I can enjoy it all right. They didn't tell the truth."

"My God, Jim, what do you mean?"

"Only one thing to mean," said Jim, shifting his pipe in his mouth. "I'm blind."

CHAPTER X

LADY MARY REMEMBERS

I HAVE seen much heroism in my time, among the strong men of the wilderness, even among the wrecks of the wilderness, cast out from civilisation —but I have never seen anything braver or finer than the way Jim took his blindness.

He simply didn't take it at all. Any reference to the blasting blow that had fallen on his life he laughed away. Any pity he refused to hear. Help he would not have—he found things for himself, dressed and fed himself, somehow or other, and on the whole far better than anyone could have expected. He could not gather wood for the fires any longer, nor could he wander over the island, getting fruits for stewing, and candlenuts for light, but he fished off the rocks industriously hour after hour, beat tappa cloth till we all had enough for at least a suit apiece, and scrubbed Sapphira's tins and makeshift cooking-vessels till they shone. He was never idle, and seldom silent. He told yarns of the "old days" (six or seven years old, but that is a generation in Papua) on the gold-fields of Sudest Island, or when the Yodda field "broke out." He made as many jokes as before—more, in fact; I saw the difference, and it cut me, for I knew what it meant, myself, to hang on desperately to a straw for humour in a drowning sea of physical misfortune. No one, for an instant, night

day, alone or in company (for you must remember that a blind man is often seen "alone") ever surprised him showing, by as much as a clouded brow or a bitten lip, the agony that he must have been suffering, in company and out of it, morning and evening, every instant of his life. For of all the sorrows that can fall upon an active, outdoor-living man, blindness is the last and worst.

What of Sapphira?

I found it hard to understand how things were going. That Jim had proposed to the much-married woman, that day on the top of the cliff, I knew; I more than suspected her answer. But it was not easy to read the rest of the tale. There was something—some understanding, some secret—I knew not what—between the two. Sapphira watched him like a mother, tended him like a man's own masculine mate, and—I am very sure, now—loved him like a lover. But on the surface there was little to see or hear. Her bitter tongue was by no means tamed down to sweetness. I think she knew that would hurt him worst of all. . . .

Flower, from the day of Jim's blindness, worked as no two men I have seen could have worked, to find out the cause. I knew the horror that haunted him night and day; I knew why he glanced so often at the golden, gem-clear eyes of the Sea-Lady, and what he feared to see in them. I knew why he examined Rocky Jim's eyes almost daily, and tested them, by daylight and dark, in every way eyes could be tested. Jim's blindness was worse than that of the Greek who had given us the most of our troubles; he could not even see in the pale light of the moon. Day, dawn, moon or midnight were all the same to him.

From end to end of the island, through every corner

of its caves, up and down every valley, along every beach, ranged the surveyor all the hours of daylight, seeking, always seeking the key to the secret that no man yet had unlocked. He even went to the red shell-beds (he had found those in a day or two) and dived over them again and again, bringing up shell fresh from the depths, and rotting it out in the sun in festering heaps, to see if by any chance the problem of Ku-Ku's Island might be linked with Ku-Ku's treasure. He caught live birds, and shut them in plaited cages, to study their habits, and the quality range of their sight. He brought rats into our cage, much to Sapphira's disgust—she was mortally afraid of rats, and did not like anyone to know it—and subjected them to draughts arising from crevices in the rock, in the hope of discovering poisonous gases. It would take me long, and patience would fail those who may read my tale, if I were to tell the half of all the tests, the investigations, the experiments he made.

And without result.

The birds gave him no information. The rats were scornfully neglectful of mephitic vapours. The shell was like other shell. In none of these things was the key to be found.

"I tell you what," said Flower to me, "I am uncommonly sorry Sapphira was with us when we went to the Greeks' cave."

"Why?"

"Because she was in such a hurry to get everything cleaned up and heaved out over the cliff. There might have been some clue."

"There might," I said. A silence fell between us; the sea, outside the island walls, slapped and gurgled

making strange noises among the coral caves, like a giant suffering from a giant cold in the head.

"At any rate," he said—and the unspoken links were clear—"it can't be long till something turns up. The signal ought to bring them." (We had replaced the flag on the beheaded palm.)

"How are the provisions holding out?" I asked.

"With those stores the Greeks left behind, we have enough for another month."

"Another month," I remarked, "will solve the problem one way or another. Either we shall be away from here, or we shall all have gone blind—and in that case the best thing we could do would be to join hands and jump together over the cliff, where the Greeks went down. It would be pleasanter than starvation."

The big man made no answer.

. . . . .

And now came down upon the island a period of gloom.

The weather failed us. Up to this, day after day had been golden; the air, morning after morning, had been of that indescribable, glassy blue that I think is nowhere seen in such perfection as in New Guinea's island world. Everything on earth and sea had been sapphired or gilded over. A line of gold ran down the centre of each palm tree frond; rocks in the sun were like huge nuggets from the Yodda or the Waria. Trees at a distance, rocks far out at sea, were washed with pure ultramarine. It was a fairy world—though like the fairy worlds of folk-lore and childish tales, a world without a soul. For nature, even as La Motte Fouque's Undine, has no soul till human creatures give it her.

But now the beauty faded, the fairy spell was broken.

Storm came upon the island. The rainy season was more than due; and at night it broke with a terrific thunderstorm, that seemed to shake the cliffs to their very roots far under sea. After that we had thunder and lightning every night, and furious rain all afternoon. The mornings were sometimes clear, with the fatal ominous clearness of the wet season, but by twelve o'clock clouds were gathering again, and all the afternoons had to be spent within our cave.

Flower would not move to the Greeks' cave, though it was better and more pleasantly situated than ours. He said, wisely enough, that so long as we did not know the source of the blindness that cursed the island we were better avoiding the place where its victims had been living and sleeping.

"It may be infectious," he said. "You did right to move to another sleeping cave, Todd." For Jim, though I have not mentioned it, had taken his bed from our cave away to a smaller one that opened out a few yards further down the side of the cliff, and had been sleeping there by himself.

An odd expression flitted over the sightless features of Rocky Jim; he half opened his mouth, and then shut it. I found myself watching him curiously.

Nothing more was said at the moment. The rain came down in a stamping, screaming flood. You could hear it thrash upon the sand and batter the tortured leafage of the palms. Papua's wet season had begun in earnest.

"It's coming in," said Flower. "We must shift." We shifted back into the big cave; it was not so light now, but the splash of stray drops from the entrance was avoided.

We had nothing to do; what work the rain permitted us was finished for the day. We had nothing to read; not a line of print was owned by any one of the party save the few scraps of newspaper that had been among our stores; and these everyone had read over and over again, advertisements and all. We had nothing to talk about, for blindness and starvation were in all our minds, and these are not things for castaways to speak about until speech can no longer be avoided. And it was not yet ten o'clock, and there were ten mortal hours before anyone could think of going to bed. . . .

The rain stamped on the sand. The sea, outside our sheltered bay, struck furious hands on the walls of the prison island. Drop, drop went the water-trickle in the corner of the cave. . . .

Lady Mary moved to the back of the cavern, and slipped behind the curtain of her own corner. I saw her flit out again by and by, a ghostly figure in her robe of pale tappa cloth. She had something in her hands. We all looked at it with interest, even curiosity. Our minds were starving.

It was the violet morocco dressing-case.

"I can't help thinking," she said to no one in particular —yet I thought she meant Flower—"that I didn't go over this as closely as I might have done."

"I am quite sure you didn't," asserted Flower, drawing himself up against the wall of the cave—he had been half sitting, half lying, on the chilly, unsunned sand.

She looked at him with a strange, unsteady expression—her eyes were like golden butterflies. . . .

"I knew you thought I should have done so," she answered, "but it has been—painful."

"I understand," he said. "The effort to remember is necessarily distressing. But for your own sake——"

"Yes," she replied quickly; "for my own sake, of course. I've always been more or less sure I had overlooked something. But how could that be?" She was addressing him directly now; I saw that her instinct, left free play, always urged her to turn for help or for guidance to the strength of this strong man beside her.

"I think," he answered her very gently, "that your memory is partly awake, and that you know something has been left in that case—perhaps in some secret drawer or opening. Only you can't remember what. That's my guess, at all events."

"Take it and look," she said.

He took the case from her. We were all passionately interested, and I don't think any one of us thought of concealing his or her interest. The barriers of polite reserve, of minor restraints and courtesies, are apt to break down when one lives on a desert island with a handful of other castaways. Sapphira came out of the kitchen cave, wiping her hands as usual, and stared hard; I drew a little closer; Jim, sightless Jim, leaned forward and seemed to listen more than ever.

Flower, with his big clever fingers, felt the case over and over, inside and out. He took a bit of grass, and measured. He held it up, and looked underneath. . . .

"The measures don't tally," was his verdict. "Here —and here."

We saw they did not. There was a small space unaccounted for.

"Mightn't that be the bottom of the jewel-case?" I asked.

"No," said Flower. "I measured down to that. . . . No, there's a space of some kind. Can you remember the spring?"

He put the case into the Sea-Lady's hands. She held it on her knee, and slid her white, slim fingers here and there—pressed—shook—tapped. . . .

"I can find nothing," she said at last. "But I seem to remember—half remember . . . I know there is a spring."

It was Jim who solved the problem.

"If you can't find the spring," he drawled, "why not smash the box?"

Strange to say, that had never occurred to any of us.

"Would you mind?" asked Flower.

"No," said the Sea-Lady; and yet I thought I saw a certain shrinking in her face. "It isn't the smashing up of the box she minds," I said to myself. "It's the thought of finding something inside. She doesn't really want to find it, whatever it is."

Flower had taken the case again, and was looking for a stone. He found one, laid the box down on another, and with one blow smashed sides from bottom, lid from sides, and split the thing to pieces. There was a sharp tinkle of glass.

"Ah! I'm sorry, I've broken something," he said, "but it couldn't be helped, if the thing was going to be opened at all."

"My word!" cried Sapphira, grabbing shamelessly. She snatched up something that shone. . . .

"Bring it to the light," said Flower, taking the glittering thing from her, and laying it in Lady Mary's hand. We all crowded together in the doorway of the cave, with the rain beating on our faces.

In the small, smooth palm of the Sea-Lady lay a miniature framed in gold. The glass had been broken by Flower's assault, but the picture was undamaged.

It was the head and shoulders of a man. Men do not often sit for miniatures, but this one had evidently thought it worth while to spend a good many hours, and a good many sovereigns, in obtaining a perfect and permanent presentment of himself. I do not say the face was not worth it. It was a fine, manly countenance, handsome, hawk-featured, blue-eyed, with the sweeping moustache that is only worn by middle-aged men nowadays, and a framing of hair just lightly touched with grey. The head was covered by—of all things on earth—a cricket cap.

"Oh! Give it to me!" I said suddenly. Lady Mary handed it over.

"Do you know who it is?" I said.

Her face paled with the effort of trying to remember something that just eluded capture.

"I . . . he . . ." she stammered. She put both hands to her temples with a gesture of despair.

"Ireland, do you know?" demanded Flower. "Tell us if you do. I seem to know the face, and yet I can't actually name it."

"I can't be certain," I said, "but I am very nearly certain that it is Lord Cedric de Crespigny."

"What, the cricketer?" All the world knew—still knows—Lord Cedric's name. For a quarter of a century it had been the most famous title in the world to lovers of British sport. You must remember that this was in the days before 1914. Then, it still seemed entirely praiseworthy and right that the Duke of Annan's younger son, strong, clever, with all gift-

all opportunities lying close to his hand, should find a reason for his existence upon earth, and an occupation for all his faculties in his mere uncommon ability for throwing and striking a ball. . . .

You remember Lord Cedric de Crespigny. You recall those interviews in the *Windsor* and the *Strand:* those photographs of the splendid figure bent above the bat; those tables of averages and scores, lovingly conned over in every public school. You have seen those almost Roman triumphs in the arena of Lord's. For five and twenty years every English schoolboy wanted to grow up to be another Lord Cedric. It was Lillie Langtry, Joe Chamberlain, Gladstone, Lord Cedric de Crespigny, in the illustrated Saturday papers; for years then nearer names—and Lord Cedric; the South African war—and Lord Cedric efficiently cricketing on the veldt, when he was not inefficiently chasing after De Wet. A gold-mine to the photographers, during all the last years of the nineteenth century, and some of the first years of the twentieth, was the Duke of Annan's magnificent cricketing son.

"Jove!" said Flower, and leant over the picture. "Of course." Sapphira craned too; Sapphira, too, remarked, "Why, of course, that's the cricketing lord." We were all so interested that for a moment we forgot Lady Mary. Then someone looked up and saw that she had fainted. She was sitting against the wall of the cave, her head drooped sideways, her eyes open, but rolled up almost into their lids. She looked exactly as if she were dead.

Sapphira reached out, and laid the girl flat on the floor of the cave, with a cool practised hand.

"Get out of the way, and give her air," she said.

"It's been too much for her. Like as not he's her father."

"No," I said. "Lord Cedric isn't married. I've heard a lot about him; the Annan family own all the land about where my people live. I've seen him lots of times. Oh, I remember. He was to marry——"

I stopped dead, and for the first time understood the meaning of the phrase, "My tongue clave to my mouth."

"Who?" asked Sapphira. I saw Flower's face, in the dusk of the cave. His eyes were burning like pale fires, but he did not speak.

"Give me that water," said Sapphira. "She's coming round all right. She just got a turn." With a skilful hand she dabbed the water on Lady Mary's forehead. "Who did you say?" she asked.

"I didn't say," I answered her. "But I saw it in the paper. He was to marry one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, the Honourable Alexandrina Meredith."

"Then I'll lay you," said Sapphira, "that's 'darling Alix.'"

There was silence for a minute. The unceasing rain thrashed on the bending palms outside. The sea battered on the cliffs.

"Don't try to sit up," said Sapphira to the girl. "You'll be all right presently. You just come over bad. How do you feel?"

"I think I am all right," answered the Sea-Lady. I thought otherwise. Her eyes were dilated, and her usually pale face flushed pink, now that the whiteness of the faint had vanished. She looked to me almost as if she had fever.

But Flower understood.

"She has remembered," he said.

"Have you remembered, Lady Mary?" cried Sapphira. "Or I hadn't ought to call you that, had I? You're the Honourable Alexandrina Meredith, aren't you? Is that as good as being a Lady?"

"Don't worry her," warned Flower. "Let her rest."

The Sea-Lady, whom we were never to call our Lady Mary any more, was sitting up now.

"If anyone cares to know who I am, or anything about me," she said gently, "I am quite ready to tell. It has all come back—in a flash. . . . Have I forgotten long? What is there that I have not told you? What does anyone wish to know?"

"You have not told us," said Flower, "who you are, how you came to be in the big ship you spoke of, and why you left it for the cutter of the Greeks. Or——" He broke off for a moment, and then went on determinedly, "who it is you are engaged to marry. Of course," he explained a little hurriedly, "it's our duty to let him know as soon as there's any chance of doing so."

Sapphira, agreeably excited, and enjoying the whole scene with a mind more single than any of the rest of us could boast, wriggled herself, sitting, over the sand to the Sea-Lady's side.

"You lean up again' me," she said, presenting a massive shoulder. "You make yourself proper comfortable, and tell us all about it. My oath, Jim, isn't it like the yarns in the *Home Romancer?*"

"I haven't heard it yet," said Jim.

The Sea-Lady, leaning up against Sapphira, and looking, in that position, like a white dove nestled against a fat comely farmyard hen, began her tale. She looked—I could not help noticing—at no one in the

cave; not at Sapphira, nor at Jim or myself, and never for an instant at Flower. Her eyes seemed to see the beating rain outside the dark archway of the cave, and the drenched red flowers blowing loose along the beach, and the froth of creamy foam that gathered, and blew, and spun away with the wind, from the mouth of the stormy inlet; nothing more. . . . It was a wild, a sobbing, a sad and homeless-sounding day.

"The story begins a long way back," she said. And she held the miniature in her hand as she spoke, and looked at it now and then. "I suppose it begins twenty-one years ago. My mother—she was Lady Grace Marlowe—was engaged to Lord Cedric."

"Your mother!" cried Sapphira. "You mean you."

"I mean my mother. Of course, I wasn't born. They had been engaged for a year, and were to be married very soon. And he loved her very, very much. He was only twenty-two; he didn't care so much for cricket in those days, though he played very well. His people intended him for the diplomatic service and he had just left Christ Church. They thought a great deal of him. His degree wasn't—well, it might have been better—but everybody knew he could do anything he liked. . . . And so he was going to marry her, and they were going to be happy ever after. And then—she met—my father."

There was a momentary pause.

"My father was splendid. He died—two years ago. I can't talk much about him, because—I loved . . ." She struggled for composure and then went on, changing the subject. "My mother liked him—better. They didn't tell Lord Cedric, because they were both honourable people, and they thought the only right thing was

to go on with it. So it came to very near the wedding. And my father was going out to India with his regiment. And he came to say good-bye. And—at the last—he kissed my mother. And Lord Cedric saw them.

"So—because he was so good and so unselfish—he stepped right out of the window where he had been standing, and went to them that moment, and told her she was free. And you know, the very church was decorated for the wedding, and the bridesmaids were staying in the castle—my grandfather's place. It was a dreadful thing to break it off. She would never have had the courage, I think. But *he* did. And he went away at once, and stayed in South America for a year. And so, by and by, my mother married my father.

"And Lord Cedric came back. Everyone said he took it so well. But he never went into the diplomatic service, and never seemed to care much about anything—except just cricket. He used to come and stay with us, and I always came—and ran—and sat on his knee. He was so good to me, always. He said I grew more like her every year. And after she died he seemed to care—more. . . .

"I was only a child then. But of course I grew up, and he still—liked me—very much. And you know, the Queen has always been a very great friend of his family, and he used to stay with their Majesties at Sandringham. So when it was my turn for duty, I met him there—oh, I did not tell you that mother was one of Queen Victoria's Maids, and dear Queen Alexandra asked for me as soon as I was old enough. . . . She never said anything at all to me about Cedric, but I think she may have said some little thing to him. The King too—he is so fond of sport, and he admired Cedric's

cricket. He has laughed at me—in a way that was like talking—and you don't know how a word from Their Majesties can influence. You can't think how we worship her and her wonderful beauty. No one who hasn't come near it can imagine. . . .

"Well—Cedric and I became engaged. And he said to me—he said—I can't repeat it—but it meant that the old trouble was gone. 'The wound is healed for ever'—that was the end of what he said."

"Did you love him, dearie?" asked simple Sapphira, putting the question that burned unspoken in Flower's mind and mine.

"Yes," answered the Sea-Lady. Then, slowly, "I think I—did—love him."

She went on.

"I had a very bad attack of influenza—last winter. The doctors said my lungs were threatened, and that I must go a long sea voyage. We had some friends—Lord and Lady Clowes—who were going out to New Zealand; he was to be Governor. And they took charge of me. And I was to stay with them for a little, and then go home.

"We took passage from San Francisco on the *Princess of Siberia*. . . . I'm getting very tired—no, don't stop me, I want to finish now, but I must cut it short. . . . The ship was wrecked. It was dreadful—dreadful! She ran into a derelict, and ripped herself open from end to end, and before they had time to get out half the boats, she . . ." The Sea-Lady covered her face with her hands.

"Don't go on," said Flower. But she would go on.

"I must finish now I have begun," she said, in an excited voice, removing her hands. I saw that her

cheeks and eyes were burning. "She's as feverish as she can be," I thought. "She'll pay for this."

"We were having a dance," she continued. "We didn't even have time to get any wraps. My maid—poor girl—ran after me with my dressing-case, because it was my jewel-case too, and when we got into a boat she flung it down to me. She went in another boat, and I never saw her again.

"My boat—it drifted away—I don't know how it happened, the confusion and screaming were so dreadful, and the ship went down almost at once, but no one else had got in and I found by and by I was quite alone: it had drifted off from the ship in one of those great ocean currents, and the people hadn't had time. They were drowning all round me a little way off, and I tried and tried to get back to them, but the current kept carrying me on. . . .

"And then they were all gone, and it was daylight again. And a great ugly boat that looked like a cargo tramp was coming up, oh, ever so fast. They saw me, and lowered a boat. When they took me on board I found they were Germans, and it didn't seem like a proper cargo-boat at all—though I didn't know much about such things. It was the maddest ship—a sort of nightmare. They were not at all pleased at having to take me on board, I could see. They were kind enough in a way, but they made me keep inside my cabin all the time, and never walk about on deck. And I think a lot of them were naval officers. One knows the type . . . but what they could have been doing . . .

"Well, the ship went for a week or two most terribly fast; she used to tremble all over, and the funnels roared so. I could see out of my porthole how the seas

went rushing past. Then one day I heard them talking; my port was open, and they were on the deck above. Of course one has to know German at Court. . . . . They said something about being near home, and about Simpsonhafen. And they spoke of me—not very kindly I thought. And someone said, 'We will put her off near the British coast; no one could expect us to do more. We have done too much as it is.'

"Then, the next day, they came upon the cutter, and they stopped, and asked the captain if he would put me off at Samarai. They paid him—oh yes, I remember they did what they could. But they ought to have seen . . . Only they were in such a hurry to get away to wherever they were going. They almost hustled me off, and stood between me and things that were on deck—things covered up. I don't know what it could have been that they did not want me to see."

"I reckon," said Sapphira, "if Carl weren't lying at the bottom of the sea, he could 'a' told us something."

"Perhaps," said the Sea-Lady. Then, all of a sudden, she seemed to break. "I am so tired, Sapphira," she said plaintively. "Can't I go to bed?"

"You can go to bed at any hour of the day or night you like, my lamb," said Sapphira, rising to her feet, and helping up the girl. "You go right off now, and I'll have a nice cup of tea for you in two shakes. And if any of you makes so much as noise enough to wake a pigeon in its nest," she said threateningly, to the rest of the party, "I'll knock the blooming head off of him, I will so."

Flower seemed to snatch at the opportunity thus offered.

"I'll go out," he said; "she has been through

tremendous strain. She ought to be kept perfectly quiet for the rest of the day. A drop of water won't hurt." And before anyone could remonstrate, he had dived out, hatless, into the battering rain.

"You, Owen Ireland, go and stop him," cried Sapphira. "He'll get his death."

"What about Ireland's death?" inquired Rocky Jim.

"No matter about me," I said, "I'll go." I had not the least intention of interfering with Flower, but every nerve in my body, every fibre in my brain, ached to be alone. How could I sit in that place all day, under the eyes of other people, and suffer what I knew I must, as soon as I had had time to think out the whole significance of what we had been hearing? If I thought of anything at all besides myself, I suppose I realised in some dim way that Flower, on that relentless morning, had gone forth into the storm to seek exactly what I was seeking, and for exactly the same reason. But there was little room, in my thoughts, for the sorrows or disappointments of anyone in the world save Owen Ireland.

Sapphira screamed something after me as I went out; I do not know what it was. I was caught up in an instant by the tempest, and had all I could do to keep my feet, and walk against the whirling blasts that tore down the glacis from above. Yet I struggled on. I am not weaker than other men, if I can take my own time, and am not hurried to keep up with swifter feet. I took my time that morning, and gradually fought my way—drenched, beaten, yet somehow helped by the very fierceness of the weather, which seemed to overwhelm and quiet the storm in my own mind—up to the top of the island.

Oh, but it was a wild, a wicked day up there! The coconuts bent and whirled, and flung their long pale tresses over their cowering heads, like women crouching away from the blows of a brutal aggressor. The grasses rose and fell in waves like a stormy sea. All the small shrubs had been cruelly knocked about; branches, flowers, berries, came flying like birds in the wind, or lay crushed and destroyed upon the track.

"It will be a job getting anything for Sapphira's stewed fruit, this next week or two," I thought. That had always been the task of Jim; now it would devolve upon me, together with many other small duties that a blind man could not carry out.

I knew whither I was heading—to the cave of the Greeks. I did not believe overmuch in the idea of infection, and even if there had been any, we had all agreed that mere roving about in a place did not infect it—otherwise Jim would not have spent his days in our cave. I didn't think, myself, that his sleeping there would have done any harm to anyone, but Jim had been the first to propose that he should shift elsewhere for the nights.

I was quite clear as to what I wanted. I wanted to get away by myself for an hour or two, think over all that the Sea-Lady had told us, and steel myself, as soon as possible, and as completely as possible, to the utter death of hope.

It was news to me that I had even cherished any. I had so often told myself that a lame man—a poor man—a man without a country, or a position, or a home, could never hope under any circumstances for the love of one so starry, so far above ordinary women as our Sea-Lady. That, from the very first. Later, I kept reminding

myself that even had I been able to approach her on an ordinary footing, her interest was straying—had perhaps already strayed—elsewhere. I told myself, over and over again, that I did not love. I quoted "Villette": *"Nobody ever launches into Love unless he has seen, or dreamed, the rising of Hope's star over Love's troubled waters."* That star had never risen for me; then it was certain I did not—could not—love the Sea-Lady. I reverenced, worshipped her—no more.

And on the morning when the last coil of her strange story was unwound for us—when I knew her to be, what I had long suspected her, one of the great ones of earth, and trebly, irrevocably pledged to a man of her own kind—then I realised in one scorching instant that I had loved, did love, and for ever would love our Lady Mary—let me call her again by that sweet "little" name.

Why! the passionate soul who wrote "Villette" herself had loved bitterly, against all hope and right; had launched, as all the world now knows, her bark upon Love's troubled waters, without that star to guide. Charlotte Brontë's love for the cold, calculating Heger, who never even gave her copper coin for her gold, who penned a shoe-mending account on the back of her most passionate letter—is one of the world's bitterest heart tragedies.

In Love there is no wisdom.

I had remembered all that I might well have forgotten, and forgotten everything I should have remembered. The "beautiful girl, too white," who had lived in Colombo, years ago, and loved the face that God had given Owen Ireland as a consolation for his crippled limb—other women, of whom I have not spoken, for

they are compassionate as angels, sometimes, and a man's infirmity may even draw the best to him—these had come to my mind. I had remembered that the island we had found was better than a gold mine to every one of us, should we ever win safe away, and that I could approach the Sea-Lady, not as a poor man, but as one who could match her own fortune, whatever it might be. And I had forgotten. . . .

. . . The brother of the "girl, too white." The looks that had burned like fire, equally, whether they were pitying or scornful, since ever I had eyes to see. The hard, rough life I had led, that had made me no fit mate, scarce even a fitting friend, for a delicate flower of England's nobility. All these things I had forgotten; and now I needed not even to recall them, any more than I needed to recall my foolish hopes, or my futile disguise of them from myself. Under any circumstances, anywhere, beneath our earthly sun and moon, the Sea-Lady could not have been for me.

As often happens when one thinks most deeply, surroundings had been wiped out for me. I reached the plateau, walked along it from end to end, and found the cave, without the slightest consciousness of what I was doing. I was wakened, as I stooped to pass under the low archway, by the sight of Flower.

He was sitting on the block of stone that the Greeks had used as table. His legs hung down; one was crossed over another, and his elbows rested on the raised-up knee. His chin was cupped in the palms of his hands. His face, with its curious marked Punch-features, looked old and hard as stone.

What a man would ordinarily do, under such circumstances, is easy to tell. He would slip away, silently,

without letting himself be seen. He would never let anyone know that he had surprised the solitude, the grief, of another—least of all would he let that other know.

But it came to me, there on the stormy summit of the island, that wind-racked, weeping day, that this was no time for common conventionalities. I knew that Flower had fled, even as I had, to face, in solitude, an unbearable sorrow. I knew that the sorrow was, almost in all things, the same as mine. But I knew something more—that it need not, and should not have been.

Because, whatever claims and duties might keep the Sea-Lady from showing all her innocent heart—she loved him.

"Not Lancelot," the handsome knight of the court, "nor another"—(oh, bitterly the other acknowledged that!)—but just our big, rough leader; the man of the wilderness, the man who lived under open skies; the man in whose hands, since ever we came to the Terrible Island, almost all our comfort and our safety had lain—he, with the ugly, kindly face and the misfit romantic name—Percival Flower.

I could not tell if he knew that she cared for him; I did not know what effect on his hopes, or his actions, the knowledge might have. But I was determined that it should, at least, be his.

I don't think I have ever done a braver thing in my life than I did when I walked right into the cave of the Greeks, and, interrupting without ceremony the solitary musings of our leader, spoke his name. For you know—or you should, if I have told my tale even half well—that Flower was not one with whose ways, or wishes, one could lightly trifle.

He jumped off the table and fairly snarled at me. If I had not been what I was, I think he would have struck. . . .

"What do you want?" he asked me, with a red-hot word or two tacked on to the enquiry.

"I want," I said, "to keep you from making a fool of yourself."

There was this of rarity and fineness in Flower's kind, that he saw, and answered, often enough, the thought that lay behind a man's speech, instead of the speech itself. My words were only the words of a meddling fellow who wanted, like some fidgety woman, to save him from a wetting. But he read them through. He looked at me with that lighthouse gaze of his. I saw the dark circles, the burned-out look, that one half-hour's bitter agony had written about his eyes. I saw the light, in the midst of all that wreck, unchanged. And to myself I said, "There is something in him that is worthy even of her."

"Will you sit down again?" I said. "I have something to tell you, and I'm not fond of standing."

He took his seat again without a word, and I sat there too, on the rough stone table, in the twilit cave, with the rain still trampling and pouring down outside, and the sweet smell of crushed leaves blowing in.

"I want to tell you," I said, "that Lady Mary loves you."

"She is not Lady Mary," was his only answer; but I felt it bore a double meaning.

"Names don't matter," I told him. "Facts do."

"Honour," said Percival Flower, "is about the biggest fact in the world. Or factor. You see, I think that names are of some account."

"Do you mean," I asked him, "that you would let her promise to a man she does not care for stand in the way?"

"Did you hear her say that she did not care for him?" was his reply.

"Why," I said, "I did hear her say that she 'thought —she—did—care' for this Lord Cedric. Would you have been satisfied with that?"

A contraction passed over his features, gone as soon as seen.

"By God," he swore, "I would not." But I think—he would.

"And do you intend to stand aside? Are you one of the people who think an engagement as sacred as a marriage? I never thought so, and I don't fancy most men do. If there is no treachery——"

"This is not," he said, "an ordinary case in any sense of the word. You heard her story. I've no doubt that if she and I came to an understanding, and told Lord Cedric de Crespigny that she had come to care for another man more than for him, he would do exactly as he did twenty-one years ago. He would set her free, as he set her mother free. I daresay he wouldn't even cut his throat over it. He didn't the first time. But—I leave you to think what a double betrayal like that would mean."

I did not answer him.

"It isn't merely a question of love," he went on. "She took up this thing—if I judge her rightly—more out of a singularly fine sense of honour than for any other reason. She had always felt that her mother's desertion—if one calls it nothing worse—had spoilt the man's life—turned it into a thing of no significance, laid

it waste with utter trivialities. She felt as she grew up that she, and only she in the world, could set the wrong right. And I think the great people who mean so much in her life must have thought so too."

"Doesn't love count?" I asked weakly. I held to my own opinions, but, as always, the force of his personality was beating me down.

He did not answer for a minute. He looked out at the writhen palm trees and the thrashing rain. Something in the storm and the suffering of Nature, I think, made answer to that which was in his own mind.

"Love," he said presently, "counts. Yes. But—it isn't everything."

"I think it is—almost," I said.

"It isn't—honour," he went on, as if he had not heard me. "It isn't a man's self-respect. Nor his common honesty. It's not all those. If you put them in a scale against it—why, the scale shakes, if it doesn't go down. And you know, Ireland, life isn't a novel. A girl does not break her heart and die because Fate gives her to a good-looking well-born fellow, with plenty of money and position, and a sort of hereditary liking for her family. If—when—she carries out the promise that her mother didn't, the Honourable Alexandrina Meredith will not go off in a decline. She will be presented on her marriage, and she'll lead the life she was born and trained to, and she'll keep a little sentimental regard somewhere for—well, Ku-Ku's Island, let's say. And it won't do her any harm. Or count much. She'll be fond of her husband; a good woman is. She'll never look outside—or know—there was anything greater in the world than what she . . ."

His iron self-possession was breaking down—almost. He could not finish the sentence.

"Flower," I said, springing off the table, "tell me in one word—do you mean to break her heart?"

"I have told you," he said, recovering himself, "that it won't come to that."

"But if it did? If you knew that in holding her and yourself to a point of honour, you *were* breaking her heart?"

"Then," he said, and I saw in his eye the light of that sternness that made many fear him, while they loved, "I would break it."

"Well," I said, breathing hard, "I can only say your ideas of honour are very much loftier than mine."

"Are they?" said Flower, turning round to face me full. "Are they, small man? I wonder just what it cost you to come up here after me to-day and tell me what you've told. Do you know, you're not a very vain man, Owen Ireland. I think, if I'd thought as you do, and seen a lucky opening for myself, I might have rushed into it, instead of——"

"I couldn't be a beastly sneak," I said.

"Ah," said Flower, "neither could I, you see. But don't talk of standards being loftier. . . . Do you know that both of us are running the best possible chance of an attack of fever?"

"I wondered if you did," I answered him. We were dripping from every thread.

"Suppose we go down and get scolded by Sapphira," he said, leading the way. "And suppose we don't talk any more about things that nothing in the world can ever change. Shake hands, Ireland."

We stopped and shook hands, with the absurd self-consciousness of Englishmen denied any more impulsive form of expression. And then we went back to the cave, and, as Flower had anticipated, were first of all most thoroughly scolded, and afterwards compulsorily fed with warm pepper drinks, by Sapphira.

CHAPTER XI

WEDDING RINGS

SAPPHIRA was aggrieved, and everyone in the cave was feeling it.

She didn't mind (she said) the greediness of men. That she was used to; every woman was used to it. What she did mind was the fact that even their well-known greediness was eclipsed, on the whole, by their laziness. They wanted to be fed, of course, whether it was Saturday or Sunday, daylight or dark. She supposed the first thing Adam said to Eve when he woke up and found her alongside of him was to tell her to hustle round and get his dinner; and she'd lay, when the Last Trump sounded, if a meal happened to be on the table at the same time, the men would insist on finishing it before they'd pay attention to Gabriel. Of course, she knew all about *that*.

But she did feel like "going to market," not to say like performing proper, when she found them too lazy to do a hand's turn towards helping to find their own food, when women were slaving their insides out cooking it for them. How one was supposed to make a sweet course—on a desolate island—without anything to make it of, and how one was going to find fresh meat to replace pigs that lazy men who'd ought to have had a fellow feeling for pigs, seeing they was so like pigs themselves, had let go away in the bush . . .

Sapphira, here becoming entangled in different and irreconcilable predicates, broke off, merely remarking with some sharpness that she hadn't a berry for the stew, nor a bit of fish for the dinner itself, and that she supposed the best thing she could do was to go and get them.

Of course, this woke up everyone in the cave. We had been, I must confess, a little lazy. Two or three days of rain, when almost nothing could be done outside, had familiarised us with loafing habits; and neither Flower nor myself had turned out quite so early as we ought to have done on this fine morning. Sapphira did not know—how should she?—that Flower had been sleeping scarcely at all; but I knew it, since I had to share his bed; and his sleeplessness, joined to my own not too easy mind, had given me more than one "white night" of late. But of this she was not aware, for, finding it inconvenient to pass in and out of our sleeping place to their own, the women had arranged another place, with a separate exit, which was part of the same great system of shore caves as ours, but gave them greater privacy.

So Sapphira, being unaware of any reason why she should temper justice with mercy, "gave it to us" hot and strong as her own favourite pepper mixtures for colds. And Flower and I, feeling guilty, hunted ourselves out at once, I to fetch the fruit, he to run down, if possible, the pig-errant. And Lady Mary, whom he had not asked to accompany him, came to the door of the dining cave, and looked at him with such sweet humble eyes that he would have been more—or less—than man, if he had not answered their entreaty by the invitation she wanted.

So we went up to the top of the island. And the Sea-Lady being after all young—so young!—and light-hearted even in the face of trouble, would have it that they were to cut long spears, tie pods of annatto on to the blunted points, and go "Pig-sticking properly"—a touch from the smeary, painty annatto pod to count as a wound; two to be, conventionally, the death of the little pig.

Flower humoured her, though I think such sport would have been more in the line of Jim—Jim who, as far as we knew, would never hunt anything, or play his amusing, mischievous tricks on anyone any more. . . . They found the little pig almost at once, where it was running about joyously in the long grass, and they set to work to "pig-stick" it with their annatto-pointed spears. But an unexpected obstacle appeared. The pig had become so tame with handling that it would not run away. It came cheerfully to greet Flower and the Sea-Lady; it poked its snout against their legs, ran round them grunting wildly, and expressed a candid desire to be fed.

"Oh, this is no good!" said Lady Mary, throwing away her spear. "It's like shooting a sitting partridge. We shall get no sport out of poor piggy."

"We shall get some dinner out of him later on," remarked Flower.

Her eyes dilated with horror.

"I can't bear to think of it," she said. "I wish we were all vegetarians. Poor piggy, he is so happy, and he wants so to go on living."

"Nevertheless, I shall knock him on the head this morning, and get him ready for dinner," pronounced Flower. "We all need fresh meat."

"Will you kill him yourself?" she demanded, with horror in her voice.

"Who else did you think was going to do it?"

"I—I don't know. I didn't think—exactly." But I saw she had thought. It would not have hurt her feelings nearly so much if I had been the one marked out to conduct the slaughter. As a matter of fact, it would have turned me deadly sick, while Flower, brought up on a cattle station, was probably able and willing to kill and dress half a dozen beasts a day.

However, I bore her no grudge. I only wanted to save her feelings in every possible way, and I bethought me that she would not trouble so much over piggy's fate if the execution were put off for a day or two, until some morning when she should not have been chasing and playing with the little beast. So I remarked, "I'm in no hurry for fresh meat; the tinned is good enough for me."

"And I won't eat a bit of the poor little dear, anyhow," said Lady Mary. "Can't he be spared—or reprieved—anyhow?"

Flower hesitated. I have never tried to paint him what he was not—perfect—and I am compelled to allow that one of his most prominent faults was tendency to refuse any request too earnestly put—"to harden," like the horrible Grandcourt of George Eliot, "under beseeching." He had made up his mind about the pig; we were really getting short of tinned stuff; and Sapphira had been practically promised the pig's head on a charger—not to speak of the rest of him—for that day.

Lady Mary saw that the pig's fate was trembling in the balance. . . . It was; and more than she, or Flower,

or I myself dreamed of was trembling in the balance too. I shudder still to think of what might have happened, that very day, if the Sea-Lady had not prevailed. . . .

But she did. If Flower had his full share of plain male obstinacy, she had hers of feminine persistence and of ruse. She did what she seldom ventured on—laid her hand on his arm; I think, though I would not swear, she even squeezed a little. . . . The best of women is a human being at bottom.

"Please," she said—and the shameless little thing *looked* a kiss—all for piggy.

Flower wilted.

"Piggy lives," he said. "Now you and I have just got to hustle about, and help Ireland to find plenty of fruit; Sapphira won't be so bad to face if we bring the basket full."

It was easier said than done. The recent storms had made sad mischief among the few edible wild fruits of Ku-Ku's Island. The wild mangoes had been tumbled in cartloads off the trees, unripe; the raspberries were mere pulp; the pretty, nectarine-like nutmeg fruits were scattered, dirty and damaged, all about the track. We had some trouble getting a supply. I went at last to the place where the cherries grew close to the cave; I hoped at least to fill up the basket there; they were small, but any port is good in a storm. I found, to my disgust, that the pardoned pig had celebrated his release by getting at the cherries before myself, eating up nearly all the windfalls, and slobbering and chewing the rest. And on the bushes not very many were ripe. I got a few, however.

I relieved my feelings by giving piggy a good smack,

which he took in quite a playful spirit, driving his snout into my worn trouser legs in return. Then, with Flower and Lady Mary, I went down to the lower part of the island to look for fish.

We got some, fishing off the rocks with cuttlefish bait, and lines twisted from wild banana fibre. And then we returned, endured Sapphira's reproaches, and found ourselves useful tasks until dinner time.

The meal was served about twelve o'clock, in the dining-room cave, upon the table that Flower and Jim had made. I am not ashamed to say that we eyed it with eagerness. Our food was one of our chief interests in these days, as is always the case with prisoners. And Sapphira was a wonderful hand at making something out of nothing.

She had done well for us to-day. We had—I remember it all, I am never likely to forget that dinner—oyster soup, thickened with sago from the forest; some small wild yams, roasted brown; fish; cabbage from the crown of a coconut palm—and better cabbage does not exist, only you must wait for stormy weather to enjoy it, since it can only be obtained from a palm that has been felled or overthrown. She had made lemon-grass tea for us, and confected a "shape" of the invaluable sago. To go with the "shape," she had a row of meat tins filled with stewed fruit.

We had not reached the stage of the sago and the fruit, but were still eating our fish, when the Sea-Lady uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Got a bone?" asked Sapphira.

"No," she answered. She was staring at her hand—the left hand on which usually shone the ring set with the wonderful pink diamond. The third finger was bare.

"I've lost my ring," she said, in a dismayed tone of voice.

Sapphira, of course, asked the foolish question that everyone asks,

"Where?"

"I—I don't know. It might have been up on the top of the island when we were getting fruit. Or it might have been when we were fishing."

She looked pale and troubled. I think she felt there was some omen connected with the loss of the ring, on a day when—one may guess—her thoughts had been very far from the giver.

Flower got up from his seat.

"Probably it was when you were picking fruit," he said; "it must be got at once. There's more weather coming up, and if the place gets all wet and knocked about again . . . There! listen to that."

A sharp patter of raindrops, advance guard of an approaching host, had sounded on the leaves outside the cave.

"Don't wait dinner for me," said Flower, hurrying out. "I've had all I want."

We went on with our fish. I remember that, good as it was, it was very bony, and required careful picking. Sapphira produced a surprise for us soon after, in the shape of some river crayfish which she had caught herself. "It's a pity that Flower went gallivanting off like that," she said. "These are real good."

She cleared away, helped by Lady Mary, who would take her part in all household duties, and then brought the sago and the fruit on the table.

"Hand us the coconut cream," she said, and poured it liberally over the helping in each tin. We took up our

spoons of shell, and were just about to begin, when Jim said something funny. I have not the least recollection of what it was, but I know it made us all laugh, and I choked over a mouthful of lemon tea, and Sapphira beat me on the back with an unopened coconut, which made us all laugh more, in the childish way of people who live in the wilderness. . . . And just as we had all settled down again, there came a crashing and smashing on the glacis, as if a couple of bulls, and two or three runaway horses, were coming down it in leaps and bounds. And in another five seconds Flower, white, panting, with a look of terror in his face, burst into the cave.

"What in Heaven's name——?" I began. But he waited for no questioning.

"Ha—have you eaten any?" he gasped out.

"Any what?"

"Fruit."

"No. Is it——?"

He had reached out, seized all the tins, two in a hand, and flung them out of the doorway on to the sand, before I had time to finish my sentence.

"Is it poisonous?" asked Sapphira. "Are you balmy? What's it all about?"

Flower, who was beginning to recover his breath now, came inside the cave, and sat down on a log. I could see, by the wetness of his hair, and the white look about his mouth, that he had been running furiously.

"It's the—the pig," he said, panting a little still. "I found him on the top of the island——"

"Dead?" cried Sapphira, her thoughts on future dinners not to be.

"No! Blind!"

"Blind?" we all screamed together.

"Yes. Blundering about and running his head into things. . . . I picked one of those mangoes he's so fond of, and put it right in front of him, and he stared at it, and never saw it. But he smelt it, and began nosing about, and by and by he found it—only by the smell. I tried him with other things. It was all the same. Then I clapped my hands suddenly, and he scared like anything, and began running, and I was just in time to stop him from going—right over the cliff. I tied him up. We must keep him and watch him. But he's blind—blind as a mole."

"Did you get the ring?" interrupted Sapphira the practical.

"Oh . . . the ring. . . ." He handed it carelessly to the Sea-Lady and she slipped it on her finger with a half absent-minded "Thank you"; there were things of greater import than rings to consider.

"I fully believe," went on Flower, white with excitement, "that we've run down the trouble at last. I've had an idea for some time that some local poison might have been accountable; that was really why I got the pigs in the first place—the Greeks' trick was just a coincidence. . . ."

"I did have a notion," I put in, "that there should have been more pigs in a place like this. . . . They usually overrun the out-of-the-way islands."

"Yes," said Flower excitedly. "It's those cherries—I'll swear they are in it somehow or other. I was looking at the bushes just now, and by Gad, they are not indigenous—they've surely been planted. Whoever put them in stuck them at pretty regular intervals, allowing for a few that have died. And the pigs—well,

they seem very fond of the fruit, and I've not a doubt that it has killed them off, by driving them over the walls of the island. This pig, you must remember, was caught very young, and shut up on the beach."

"But how could cherries blind anyone?" I asked.

Many who read this will of course have the answer ready in their minds. But they must remember that these things happened years ago, in an obscure and lonely place, and that all the castaways were New Zealanders or English. If we had had a North Queenslander among the party . . . Yet even in North Queensland the thing was not universally known—at the beginning of the century.

Flower had no reply ready. He thought for a moment or two.

"There is some analogy in the case of belladonna," he said. "It is not an impossible thing. Anyhow the facts are there. And everything you think of seems to prove it. The cherries were all up on the top, near the Greeks' cave; they must have been eating them from the beginning. And we didn't touch them, because we kept clear of the place."

"Birds ate them," I remarked.

"That isn't the proof of wholesomeness that people used to think. We can eat things that kill birds. And the converse. The pig runs us much closer."

"I always told you so," remarked Sapphira, trenchantly. And the seriousness of the discussion broke up for a moment into laughter.

"I can give you a better proof than any," spoke a voice that had been silent hitherto, the voice of Rocky Jim. "I was eating those cherries the evening before I went blind."

"Had you eaten any before?" asked Flower.

"Don't think so. I had got the habit of chewing coconut, and I missed it, up there on top, so I took a few cherries instead. They were fairly good to eat."

"And one must say they look most inviting," I put in. "They are a bit longer than ordinary cherries, but otherwise they're just right—cold, sour, surface little specks and all."

"And they have been planted, if they were planted, just where no one going to see the cave could miss them. . . . I begin to think that Ku-Ku was an amazingly cunning old brute."

"But," objected the Sea-Lady, "no fruit bears all the year round. What about the part of the year when it wouldn't be bearing at all?"

It took the surveyor a minute or two to work out that problem. "Let me think . . ." he said. "I have it. From what Carl told us, and what we can see ourselves, Ku-Ku's Island is inaccessible all through the south-east season. This is the north-west season; the island is accessible—more or less—and the berry is in bearing. . . . What a head the old sinner had!"

"I wonder where he got the stuff?" speculated Jim. "I never saw it anywhere else in Papua."

"Ku-Ku was a bit of a traveller," was Sapphira's contribution. "They blackbirded him in the old days, and took him to the Queensland sugar fields, and lots of other places."

"Well," said Flower consideringly, "the chances are that we have the secret at last—thanks to your saving of piggy." He looked at the Sea-Lady. "Of course you've saved him for good now. He must go away with us as soon as any boat comes along, and see the doctor."

At that word Jim raised his sightless eyes.

"You're pretty much a doctor yourself, aren't you?" he asked. "What do you think of my chances?"

Flower temporised. I think he had in his mind the recollection of the native Sapphira had known, who never saw the light of the sun again, after his fatal discovery of Ku-Ku's Island.

"Medical science is progressing rapidly," he said. "When we get away, the first thing to do is to get you to the School of Tropical Medicine in Brisbane, and see if they can't fix you up all right."

. . . . .

"When we get away!" How many times the words were repeated in the days that followed! A fever of unrest had seized us all. We no longer feared the greatest peril of the island; the lesser peril—that of the murderous Greeks—had been swept away; we had food enough to keep us from starvation for a good many weeks. Yet now we longed and ached to get away, as we had never longed in the days when peril seemed to encompass every step. We could not settle to anything. Tappa cloth garments were always being wanted, for the papery stuff did not wear well, and fishing had to be done, and wood collected, and pigs and pigeons snared. But all these tasks were hurried through, or, as often as not, left undone. We could not keep ourselves from running ceaselessly to the top of the island, to see that our signal was flying from the palm tree and to look, far and wide, eagerly and always, always fruitlessly, for the streak of black smoke or the sail that was to set us free.

Of course, one could not catch a glimpse of the open sea from the landlocked inlet where we lived. The towering cliffs shut off everything but a narrow stretch

of enclosed green shallow lagoon water. The boat channel that led to the open sea wound crookedly between high rocks. An army might have burst upon you unawares, down by the cave houses of the beach. . . .

The days dragged on. I remember one in particular, that seemed at least twenty-four hours in length. We had got up rather early, to look for cuttlefish bait among the pools, before the sun should have made the reef unbearably hot. We had loafed and slept a good deal of the forenoon, waked up feeling hot and livery, as people who "cat-nap" in the daytime do feel in tropical countries, and gone down—at least Flower and I had—for a bathe in the lagoon. It was extremely hot there, and we came out warm and sticky, and not at all refreshed. And we walked up to the top of the island to see if that eternal ship was coming, and of course she wasn't. And we went for a stroll in the big forest at the far side of the island, looking for we didn't quite know what, and we didn't find that either. And then we made back to the beach again, quite convinced that it must be dinner-time at the earliest; and our sundial clock (a stick stuck upright into the sand) informed us that it was not more than eleven.

"Oh, blow!" said Flower feelingly. . . .

The day did wear through at last.

> "Although the day be ever so long,
> At length it ringeth to evensong,"

hummed Flower, in his deep bourdon bass, as the sun dived sharply behind the wall of the coral cliff. It was not evensong yet by any means, if by evensong one meant actual dusk; for up on the top of the island, and out at sea, full daylight would hold for quite an hour.

But here, below, the shadows were beginning to gather, darkening the white sand, touching the ivory-coloured walls, and slowly, slowly filling the well-like space of the little cliff-bound bay. We seemed to be drowning in the flood of the advancing night . . . even as all of us, whether we knew it, in rare dark moments, or whether we did not, were drowning, slowly, surely, through twenty or fifty or seventy long years, in the flood by which all mankind are overtaken at last. . . .

At this hour it was always pleasant to come out from the cave, and sit upon the sand, listening to the chuckling calls of birds settling down for the night among the hibiscus trees, and smelling the fresh scents that came up as the dews began to gather. We were all out on the beach together, that evening, perched on various lumps of rounded coral "brainstone," and doing nothing at all. Nobody was even talking, except Sapphira, and she was merely relating an anecdote about some miner who didn't know how to cook, and wouldn't learn, and hadn't a cooky boy, and lived on biscuits and whisky, and in consequence died "on the Woodlarks," which expression I understood vaguely to mean a certain island goldfield, and not a mortal disease, as might have been supposed.

"I don't say that whisky hasn't its uses," she was concluding. "It kills the insects in the blood that brings fever and other things. But whisky for breakfast—and lunch—and morning tea—and afternoon tea—and din——"

The Sea-Lady never interrupted anyone. At least, she had never done so since we first met her, that long-ago, wonderful evening on Croker Island, and I do not suppose she had ever done so before then, being the most

courteous of little ladies. But now, without a shadow of politeness, without the least consideration, she cut into Sapphira's tale.

"Look!" she said. "Look! *Look at the boat!*"

The last four words were a scream.

We were all of us, except Lady Mary, sitting with our backs to the narrow lagoon, and to the crooked passage by which we had originally come to Ku-Ku's Island. At her words we jumped to our feet, and whirled round. And there, just turning the corner of the passage, gliding along, fending off from the rocky walls with oars and with hands, was a dinghy full of men.

For one stabbing moment I had the thought, "It is the rest of the Greeks!" Then I saw that the crew were natives, and that the one white man who sat in the stern, steering, and keeping a sharp look-out over the painter of his boat, was—Carl!

I don't know what you would do if you were suddenly rescued from a desert island by a man you thought to be dead. I know what we did; it was not dignified, but it was very natural. We shouted—all sorts of things: greetings, exclamations, and words stranger than exclamations; we ran up and down the beach; we spread out hands of welcome to Carl and his men before they were within fifty yards of us, and I am not at all sure that some of us didn't try to dance. I certainly saw Sapphira jumping madly up and down in one place, almost unnoticed in the excitement of the arrival. Lady Mary, however, did not dance, did not scream, did not even clap her hands, as I know I was doing.

She stood quite still in one place, with her hands clasped before her, and looked at the boat. And I saw, even in that moment, that she had grown very white.

On the face of Rocky Jim, however, a great light had dawned, and I knew then, seeing how he welcomed the chance of deliverance, what the bitterness of his unalleviated, unhelped misfortune must have been.

I don't know which of us got hold of Carl first, when he landed. I think all of us, or all but Lady Mary, seized whatever piece of him was within reach. I know that he remonstrated laughingly, crying to us not to pull him in fragments before he got a chance of saying a word. And then we led him, among us, to a rock, and set him forcibly upon it, and began asking questions, very loud and all together.

"Where did you come from? Weren't you sunk?"

"What ship are you in?"

"Where's the cutter with the rest of those damned Greeks?"

"Have you got any real tea?"

"Have you a drop of decent whisky?"

"Does anybody know where we are?"

"Did you see our signal?"

"Wasn't there any search-party sent?"

"Tell us everything about everything."

"Giff me time—giff me time!" said the Swede slowly. "You are all in such a hurry. How can a man tell all these thingce at once? I am not come in one ship" (with pride), "I am come in two. Yes, there is a search-party that was looking for you everywhere, and that iss one of the ships, but they would not haff found you if I had not meet them, and brought them here with me. I am in an auxiliary ketch" (with increased pride). "It iss that one of Wilson's. Andt the search-party are in that little steamer *Murua*."

Here we broke out again.

"But why didn't you come sooner? Why did you leave us here two months? How did you get away yourself?"

"There iss one answer to thoce two questions. My *Tagula* she was driven on to the big reef in that gooba——"

"I told you so," from Jim.

"Andt she slid off, and went down—oh, my lovely ship!—into fifty fathom. I have no ship any more."

"You've got as good," said Jim. "We've found Ku-Ku's stuff, and something much better, and we won't forget you. Where were you all this time?"

"In hospital in Samarai. The currentce, they carried me to another reef, and all day and all the next day I lay there in the sun."

Flower made a clicking noise with his tongue. We all knew what was meant by full exposure to the New Guinea sun, even on land, and with a hat to protect you. And this man had lain, for two days, unsheltered, upon a reef, with the reflecting sea all round.

"If you aren't made of cast iron, you ought to be dead," was the surveyor's verdict.

"Then I am made off iron, for I did not die, though I was struck very badt with the sun, and the nativce, they found me and took me in a canoe, but they thought I was quite dead. Then when they foundt I wass not, they threw the sea water on me, all the time, and we were dayce and dayce getting in, and I do not know how it was that I did not kick that bucket, but they brought me at last to Cape Nelson. So the *Merrie England*, the Government yacht, she wass there, and she ran me as fast as they could go to Samarai, and the doctor he said, 'What for do you bring this man? He is already

very dead.' But I got alive again, and then he see he will have plenty of feece from me, so he work very hardt and here I am, but I am easily tiredt still."

"Have a coconut," said Flower. "We can't offer you anything else."

"Oh—the beer," said Carl suddenly. "Get it, boyce. I haff thought," he explained, "that you will all feel like a drink of nice be——"

He had no time to finish the sentence. The boys were carrying large cool-looking bottles out of the boat; and Flower, myself and Jim—the latter led by Sapphira—were already precipitating ourselves upon our prey. We didn't wait for corkscrews, but simply knocked the necks off the bottles, and poured the frothing, amber liquid into coconut shells.

"Thank God!" said Jim piously, raising his face out of his cup. "Sapphira, have you had any?"

"No fear," said the pioneer woman contemptuously. "I like beer well enough, but I don't go down on my knees to pray to it, and them that do had better keep it all."

There was such a flavour of contempt for mere male sensuality in her tone, that none of us dared to offer her any further share. We felt better when we had emptied the bottles. It was almost dark now, but the cooking fire gave light. We proceeded with our catechism.

"Carl, have you——"

But the sea-captain interrupted us.

"Now I haff answered enough," he said. "I shall ask some questionce, for my turn. What iss the matter with Jim?"

"I'm as blind as a bat," explained Jim coolly.

"Is anyone else blindted?"

"No." We told him how we had at last lit upon the long-kept secret of Ku-Ku's Terrible Island.

"My wordt! My wordt!" he kept saying. "And who iss those Greeksce you keep talking about?"

This meant another explanation. "Did you see anything of their cutter?" I asked, at the end of our tale, with some anxiety. For if the Greeks had recognised the real value of the island, and gone to Port Moresby to claim it . . .

"I saw nothing at all off her, not hass anyone else. I haff heard no talk of her at all. I think that gooba that killed my *Tagula*, it hass done for her."

"Please the pigs, it has," said Jim piously. And I may add here that nothing more was ever heard of the boat.

"Now it iss my question," put in Carl. "I want to know when this Jim hass married Sapphira."

"*What?*" Even the Sea-Lady joined in that cry.

Jim and Sapphira did not. "What on earth do you mean, Carl? How could anyone——"

"I haff travelled a lot all ofer the worldt," remarked Carl, not at all perturbed. "I am Lutheran, but I know some thingce. Haff you a match?" He had a cigarette in his hand.

"Of course not. Take a fire-stick," I said, handing it to him. At the same time Flower and myself fell upon his packet of cigarettes, and plundered it, handing a share to Jim. . . .

"What on earth——" demanded Flower.

"Look what he is wearing," said Carl. And we all saw what, somehow or other, we never had noticed before—that Jim still sported the wedding-ring he had won from Sapphira, and that it was on his third finger. Also that Sapphira had one ring, and no more, on hers.

"What have you done with the rest?" I asked, amazed.

"Jim has one," she replied composedly; "the other I chucked into the sea. I don't want to rub it in that I've been married three times before."

"Before? But Sapphira, there's no clergyman or magistrate——"

"Of course not. But Jim and me, we're both Catholics. I let up on it a bit for some years, but——"

"She's been attending the annual muster all right, this last year or two," explained Jim. "And she's originally branded Holy Roman. Oh yes, she belongs to the herd all right."

"But what's that got to do with it?"

"You heretics," said Jim calmly, "don't know much. The Pope allows us just to marry each other, if we've been two months waiting for a priest and none has turned up. Sapphira and me, we waited the two months quite regular. Then we said the service all over. I didn't remember the run of it much, but she's pretty well up, you know, and I'll lay we didn't miss any of it. We're married all right, according to the Church, and that's good enough for me, till we can get to a magistrate to tie up the rest of the knot."

"I should think so," said Sapphira loftily. "What's enough for the Holy Father is enough for any miner that ever scratched dirt on the Yodda. Or ought to be."

"But you know," said Jim thoughtfully, "you oughtn't to have married a man you'll have to lead about with a string."

"Huh!" snorted Sapphira. "I'd 'a' done that anyhow. With any man that ever walked on two feet —blind or seeing."

"Oh no, you wouldn't, Sapphira," said Jim softly. "Just you wait till I get down to the Tropical School of Medicine. . . ."

"Well, when you do?"

"Did I ever tell you," asked Jim conversationally, "what I meant when I said that you wouldn't smack my head a third time?"

"No. . . . You can tell me now, if you want to so bad as that."

"I meant," said Jim agreeably, "that a man who could throw and brand a wild cow from the bush, up in the Territory, as I've done time and again, wouldn't have much difficulty in spanking one wild woman."

"If you wasn't blind——" said Sapphira, shivering.

"I won't be always, Sapphira, and then you can smack my head again—if you dare to."

"When you two love-birdce haff done cooing," remarked Carl, "we might as well be getting any thingce you haff ready for the boat."

"Do you mean to go off to-night?" asked Flower.

"Yess. The tide suits, and it does not always suit, about a place with these badt currentce. Pleass, will you get your thingce?"

"Sapphira," said Jim suddenly, "I want you for a minute. They walked away together, and conversed for a little while out of earshot. In the light of the fire, I saw Sapphira's face convulsed with sudden laughter. She slapped Jim on the back, and then put her hand over her mouth, and became surpassinglygrave.

We were not long getting "things" on board; we had uncommonly little to take away. The pig and the shell money—which during the last few days Flower and I had carried down to the beach—were the only

articles of luggage in which anyone betrayed much interest. There was plenty of tinned stuff left from the stores of the Greeks. Jim and Sapphira said they would take charge of that, but I didn't see it in the boat when the four of us got in. I thought Sapphira just a trifle rude, in insisting as she did that she and Jim should go first. But I suppose she was anxious about the safety of the blind man. And the dinghy would not hold more than three, besides the crew and Carl. Carl came with us; he said he would not trust anyone else to steer the boat through the reefs. "They'll come back for you in half an hour or a very little more," he said to Flower and Lady Mary apologetically. And, of course, I knew better than to insist on staying with them. . . .

So we rowed away down the tortuous boat passage, leaving Flower and the Sea-Lady standing alone, beside the dying fire.

. . . . . .

As to what happened after, I believe there are people in Port Moresby and Samarai even to this day who maintain that I knew more about it than I chose to allow. That is entirely untrue. I will not say that, in the place of other people—another person—I would not have acted as he did, provided the idea had occurred to me. But it did not; it was not likely to. So I decline to bear the responsibility for anything whatever. I only relate the facts.

When we got outside the boat passage, we found a calm sea, lit brightly by the afterglow of sunset, and partly by the stars. There was no moon. Out beyond the reef, a safe distance away, lay two ships, the wretched little steamer they had sent out in search of us, and the

auxiliary ketch captained by Carl. For the latter boat we steered. Jim and Sapphira made an astonishing fuss about getting their things on board, and it was nearly twenty minutes, I should guess, before Carl found himself free again.

"You haff kept me too long," he said. "Mr. Flower and the Lady Mary, they will be wildt with me."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Jim. "They aren't going in the ketch."

"Not going in the ketch?"

"No. Didn't you hear Flower explaining? Perhaps you were too busy. I heard him all right. He's in an awful sweat about getting to Port Moresby as quick as possible, and he said he wouldn't travel, or advise Lady Mary to travel, in this auxiliary brute of yours, for a fortune. Said he knew too much about her, and didn't want any more wrecks. Said when there was a steamer going, it was his duty to put Lady Mary aboard of that. You send over the dinghy for a minute with Sapphira, and she'll make them get a hustle on, aboard the *Murua*."

"Well, if he wants it," said Carl, obviously huffed, "he can travel on any damn steampot he likes. If Sapphira will be so kindt—I have no wish to leave any ship again, if I can help it, about this badt sort of island —but if she will go——"

"Of course she will," said Jim.

Sapphira, with astonishing amiability, climbed down into the dinghy again, and told the boys to "Shake her up and go along *Murua*." We saw the dinghy run alongside; saw another put out from the *Murua*, and head towards the mass that represented Ku-Ku's Island. The last traces of sunset were gone now; no moon had risen, and it was very dark.

We waited till we saw the *Murua's* boat reappearing out of the gloom. Sapphira had returned; she leaned over the rail of the ketch and shouted out, "All right?"

"All right: he come," howled a native in reply.

"Up anchor!" shouted Carl. "We've hung about here too long. Get a move on, you black cowce." He swung a rope's end threateningly among the crew. Obviously the Swede was out of temper at the insult offered to the boat he was captaining.

We got away a minute or two after the *Murua*. Using our engine to work out, we were not very far behind her at first; but Carl shut off the engine as soon as we cleared into the open sea, and felt a favouring breeze caress our sails. The course of the *Murua* was, naturally, not the same as ours, and we lost sight of her in the gloom of the moonless night almost at once.

Sapphira arranged with Carl to call at Croker Island, so that she could get her "things" and settle with a neighbour (ten miles away) to come and take charge of the store. Then we went down to Samarai. The *Murua*, when we arrived, was reported as passed, and well on her way to Port Moresby, where the officials who had sent her out were doubtless awaiting her return with anxiety.

Jim and Sapphira, as soon as the B.P. boat came in (which was a few days later), went on board, taking their tickets for Brisbane. I had no intention of leaving Samarai for the present, but Jim insisted I should travel to Port Moresby.

"I tell you," he said, "we shall all lose the island if you don't. The people on the *Murua* don't know what we found, but . . . Anyhow, you've got to go."

"What do you suppose Flower will be doing?" I

said angrily. "Won't he have taken up the island long before this?"

"I bet you Sapphira's wedding-ring and mine," said Jim—(by the way, they had had their canonical marriage duly ratified by British law, at the magistrate's office)—"that he won't be doing any such thing."

"You seem to think you know him better than I do," I remarked.

"I know some things better than you do. There's no use arguing, Ireland, you've just got to come."

And come I did. I was exceedingly puzzled, especially as I could see that there was some confidence or other between Jim and Sapphira, which appeared to be of an amusing nature, and to which I was not admitted. But on the morning when the *Moresby* came in sight of her namesake port, the mystery was solved.

We were tying up to the wharf; the usual crowd was standing staring up at the steamer; the hills of Port Moresby, green and purple with the north-west season rains, stood up high and peaky all about the town. I was gazing at it all, and thinking of the many strange things that had happened to me since I last saw those hills, when Jim came up beside me, feeling his way by the rail.

"I say, Ireland," he remarked, and blind as he was, the old wicked twinkle shone visibly in his eye. "I suppose you think Flower and Lady Mary are somewhere in port here—staying at Government House, no doubt."

"Aren't they?" I asked.

"Not much," chuckled Jim. "They're still on Ku-Ku's Island."

"On Ku-Ku's! . . . Jim, are you mad?"

"A lot saner than you are. Think I was going to let

that duck over in England have a bonzer girl like Lady Mary, when a good New Zealander wanted her, and she wanted him? Seems to me Lord Mustard-and-Cress, or whatever his dashed name is, hadn't the knack anyhow of keeping his girls, and a man who can't keep his girls—I always *have* any I wanted to. . . . Well, anyhow, Sapphira and I, we just planned it up between us. And they're left behind. We told the people on the *Murua* that they'd come with us, and we got the *Murua's* boat to run along under the lee of the island for ten minutes, just to take you all in——"

"How did you account——"

"Oh, told the *Murua's* crowd it was necessary, to see if the tide was turning—they didn't know the place, and would believe anything. And Sapphira fixed it up with the boys to give that hail. She can talk any native lingo you like, and they'd rather obey her than any of their own 'taubadas.' That's the way it was done."

"But, my God, Jim, what are we going to do about it? They can't go on stopping there."

"No," said Jim coolly. "We'll explain the mistake and send back at once. I reckon there's enough scandal started by now to do the trick. Especially as Lady Mary is as nervous as a kitten and would go mad or die if Flower went camping alone on top of the island."

"But, Jim—you don't suppose for an instant——"

"I don't, not being a born fool. But I won't answer for what the tongues of New Guinea will suppose. If Flower and Lady Mary don't hitch it up now, as soon as they get a chance—why, there'll be the devil to pay all over the South Pacific. He's mighty keen on a point of honour, by all that you told me. Well, there's one for him."

"Jim," I said gravely, "do you mean to say that you wouldn't have done just as he did, under the same circumstances?"

"Oh, probably," he agreed, "being much the same sort of an ass in some things. But—if anyone had done for me what I've just done for him—why, I wouldn't exactly call him out for it, supposing we lived in duelling times, or in France."

The whole thing left me speechless; I sat down on a deck seat, and stared at Jim, till I think he felt my gaze even through his blindness.

"No one on earth but you would have dared——" I began.

"If you won't get on shore pretty soon," he interrupted, "and up to the Lands Office, before anyone gets ahead of you, I wouldn't give much for our chance of Ku-Ku's Island. There's been talk on this ship."

I got ashore. But the business that ensued, though passionately interesting to ourselves, and of the last importance, as concerning Jim's own future, Sapphira's, Lady Mary's, Percival Flower's and mine, could have small interest to anyone who may read this tale. We secured the island, and knew that fortune was ours.

I think I will let a letter of Jim's, which I received some few weeks later, tell the rest of the tale.

"BRISBANE.

"DEAR IRELAND,

"You will notice that I am writing this in my own hand, so it won't be necessary to tell you that the doctors have fixed me up. I don't see so well with one eye as I should like, but the other is all right, and perhaps it's as well for a married man to have a blind side.

"They tell me I am mighty lucky. A year or two ago no cure for this trouble was known. It has occurred

in Queensland, but the cause wasn't run down till quite lately. Seems it is the 'finger cherry' of North Queensland that is the villain of the piece. To eat it is to go blind. There's a whole family of children in this hospital undergoing treatment for the same thing, and I'm sorry to say some of the poor little beggars do not seem to be recovering. The Government of Queensland has classed it as a noxious weed, and is doing everything possible to stamp it out, but I daresay it will continue to exist and do mischief in out-of-the-way places for many a year to come.

"Old Ku-Ku was blackbirded, as Sapphira told you, and carried off to work in the North Queensland sugar country when he was young. Knowing, as we all do, how keen the New Guinea native is on poisons of every kind, the rest of the story is plain.

"I have been hearing things down here that seem to point to a sort of bust-up in German New Guinea, one of these days. That place will take watching. Carl knows more than he cares to talk about, I think; people have a way of calling you a fool if you see further than they do. That was a man-of-war the Sea-Lady travelled on—disguised. Why? and what up to? Some day we shall know. I'm glad you handed the shell and shell-money to Carl. It will get him another *Tagula*.

"Thanks for forwarding the cake. I never ate a bit of wedding-cake with a better appetite; and I reckon she'll very soon stop pretending to be angry with me. Flower is in the right of it to talk of setting up a yacht; it will suit the Sea-Lady. I say, Ireland, don't you suppose Lord Mustard-and-Cress might have another chance, if he'd wait twenty years more? He seems to have a fancy for that family line, and he'd only be about sixty-two—a mere youth.

"Sapphira sends her love. I don't think that 'murder' is going to worry her much more; it seems likely to be expiated. About mid-winter, I should say.

"You have got to ask me to your naturalist's palace on Croker Island when you get it. Yes, get the E——s to help you to collect for it. They are Rothschild's men, and they can find you any bug in New Guinea.

"Sapphira and I are buying Marwood Downs; it has thirty-five thousand head of cattle, and a good house. I shall feel at home there. I'm full up with mining.

"Talking of cattle—she never did again.

"JIM."

. . . . .

The years have passed.

I have my naturalist's palace, my science—a little fame, too, nowadays—and my dreams. Life is, at best, "a dream within a dream." . . .

For Lord Cedric, who lost the Sea-Lady, I, who lost her too, had a sympathy that Jim could not have known. . . . In the red days of the war I travelled home to England—not to fight, as Flower was doing, but to offer what little service in other ways a crippled man could give. I went to the country town near which the castle of the Annan family stands. I saw a white marble monument, raised to the memory of a man who lost most nobly the life that I think he cannot have longed over-much to live out to its end. Above the green cricket ground of the village Lord Cedric stands, white, in his soldier's dress; a cricket bat and ball lie at his feet.

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